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We open this issue with an article on television by Stephen Heath and Gillian Skirrow (a co-producer of the ITV *Viewpoint* programmes, now teaching at Strathclyde University). The article took its origin specifically in the need to contest the notion of 'impartiality' whose spectre was raised by the Independent Broadcasting Authority in its decision to withdraw the *Viewpoint* series. More generally, however, the authors were led, in the course of an analysis of a particular television programme ('Yesterday's Truants', from Granada TV's *World in Action* series), to interrogate the notion of the television institution in a mode analogous to that in which the cinematic institution, or cinematic 'machine', has been approached in recent writing in this journal. It is important to stress here that the television institution cannot be simply grasped either as a 'medium' or as a set of discrete 'messages'. On the contrary the attempt to focus television as a specific signifying practice developed by the authors also engages problems of understanding the positions and relations of the viewer instituted by that practice. The implications of these problems for work both in and on television were the subject of a debate at a weekend school held by the Glasgow SEFT group in June this year and will be a main concern of the readers' meeting to accompany this issue.

The impact of television has notoriously been felt by other media apparatuses – radio and cinema – into whose area it has encroached. Significantly neither medium has in fact been destroyed by its all-englobing rival, but both have been displaced from central positions relative to the state and to the capitalist entertainment industry. This decentering has led in some cases to simple marginality, but also to the opening up of new spaces and a recentering of productive activity away from the obvious loci of institutional control. The opening up of such spaces, not independent of either

6 capital or the state, but in a different relation to them, has had
positive effects both in the area of local radio (witness the frantic
attempts of the Annan Report to bring it back into orbit) and in
that of 'independent' film-making. We hope, in future issues, to
be able to offer an analysis of some of the conjunctural shifts that
have taken place and so permitted the (still precarious) insertion
of radical aesthetic practices into the arena of British film culture.
Meanwhile it is worth recalling the judgement made in a *Screen*
editorial three years ago (v 15 n 3, Autumn 1973) that, in the con-
text of British film culture, both the film *Penthesilea* and the ideas
expressed about it by its authors, Laura Mulvey and Peter Wollen,
' might appear totally aberrant '. While at the time this was cer-
tainly all too true, it is so no longer, and the authors' second film,
Riddles of the Sphinx, the script of which we print in this issue,
has had a reception that would have been unthinkable three years
ago.

This is not to say that there have not been resistances. Indeed
it would not say much for the film if there hadn't been. What are
interesting here are not those resistances that come from sections
of the film-critical establishment (*Guardian*, *New Statesman*, etc)
but those from within the active area of the film's constituency.
The positions taken by the film cut across a number of those
current in political and theoretical debate in relation to film, to
psychoanalysis and to feminism. The script as published here pro-
vides material on the basis of which the intersection of the film
with these debates can be more accurately evaluated, but further
questions of how the film's project can be read and the extent
of the challenge it makes to current orthodoxies will be discussed
in our next number.

The questions of feminism and psychoanalysis raised by *Riddles
of the Sphinx* are also taken up, differently, elsewhere in this
issue, first in relation to Hollywood melodrama and secondly
in a discussion of a new journal from the USA, *Camera Obscura*.
It is worth noting here that the problems that we would see as
central for film analysis at the present time have an incidence
over an extremely wide area, but are going to be raised differently
by different writers and in different places. Thus the question of
the suturing of the gaps in the classical film text is posed by Philip
Rosen in his article on Borzage's *Seventh Heaven* without reference
to the position of the subject, while the discursive subject appears
as a problem in Deke Dusinberre's study of Peter Gidal's writing
and film-making practice. That both Gidal and Borzage could re-
ceive an alternative treatment, in this magazine or elsewhere, goes
without saying. What should perhaps be stressed here is the legiti-
mate diversity of approaches over a broad area where the questions
are intricately connected but where the answers cannot be made
artificially homogeneous.

GEOFFREY NOWELL-SMITH

Stephen Heath and Gillian Skirrow

' Watching a television programme, we feel not so much that we are being taken out into the world, as that the world is being brought to us.' G Millerson, *The Technique of Television Production*, London 1972, pp 201-2.

INTRODUCTION

The political necessity for a close and constant attention to television is easily recognised: like going to school, watching television has become a fundamental component of social being, by now an obligatory requirement for full membership of the modern capitalist state; television's stake in 'our reality' is massive, and is the context of the immediate importance of carrying ideological struggle effectively onto its terrain. Beyond this easy recognition, however, there remains the problem of the ways in which such an attention is to be developed; a problem not simply because of what a recent *Screen Education* editorial (n 20, Autumn 1976) referred to as ' an almost total lack of theoretical television work ', but equally, and more crucially perhaps, because of the limiting terms in which the little work done has tended to be conceived.

Given the immediate importance of focussing television directly in its programmes and productions as a point of ideological struggle, one inevitable approach has been to look at the most obviously sensitive areas — news, election coverages, certain topics treated in magazine or current affairs programmes. The approach, via these areas, allows a rapid and often biting demonstration to be made of specific ideological dominations in the terms of a content analysis for which television itself is never specifically brought into question. A more sophisticated version of this approach tries to raise the question of television in the analysis by recourse to a communication model which can do no more finally than contain it as the discovery of a visible conflict in the transmitted content, of a conflict, say, between broadcaster and politician. No doubt the reference to communication has its attractions but those attractions are not, of course, innocent, as the general acceptance of the expression ' mass communications ' should indicate (remember, moreover, that the word ' communication ' is intimately linked in its history to the expansion of industrial capitalism) and there

8 is every reason for a politically critical analysis not to begin by
accepting from the outset one, of the very definitions of its activity
assumed by television. Indeed, it can be maintained – and we main-
tain – that communication cannot be a theoretical concept, still
less an adequate model, for historical materialism insofar exactly
as it serves to block materialist questions of production and signify-
ing practice. To start with communication is always to come back
to the canonical structure of sender, receiver, message and trans-
mission; hence the constraint on the more sophisticated approach
mentioned above to identify *in the analysis* a simple originating
source – the broadcaster or broadcasters – able to function as a
determining point of relation for the other elements in the struc-
ture, thus held in a neatly dramatic coherence. But nothing tells us
necessarily – as a necessity for its analysis – that the activity of
television can be summed up, or even principally summed up, in
the *communication of messages*, and certainly *not that its ideo-
logical operation and institution is to be understood merely, or
even mainly, in such terms. There is some need, in other words,
to displace the terms of analysis, to specify television in the forms
of its activity, as production, as signifying practice.
  Bringing television specifically into question is in no way, how-
ever, to appeal to an aesthetic attention, of the kind that has
informed all the 'television-as-a-medium' discussions, the 'tech-
nique-of-television' manuals, and so on. Perhaps the division of
television studies into four main sectors in the BFI Television
Monographs series' statement of aims was unavoidable, but the
separation out of a sector concerned with 'the aesthetic practice
of television' always runs the risk – that no amount of subsequent
'inter-relation' will overcome – of setting apart the central area
within which analysis needs at once to be political and ideological.
Which is why, again, the study of television as specific signifying
practice is not to be trapped in a reference to the power of the
medium, televisuality, or whatever. When Raymond Williams
writes, for example, that 'one of the innovating forms of tele-
vision is television itself',[1] this cannot be allowed to confine
'television itself' to a technology or a single isolable element of
the viewing experience: 'television itself' is everywhere in tele-
vision, everywhere in the operation of 'form' and 'content' that
a communication-based analysis takes for granted.
  All this is to suggest something of our present aim: to begin
tentatively to examine television itself in action, the *grounds* of
television – tentatively since we have no ready answers and will
be concerned rather to pose one or two terms and problems of
analysis, more to open out than to close issues. All this is to
suggest too that the ambition of that aim is not to contribute to

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1. R Williams: *Television: Technology and Cultural Form*, London
1974, p 77.

the establishment of a 'television studies' in the wake of the
'film studies' now becoming academically available as a new and
self-contained discipline. On the contrary, its ambition is theoretical
work in the context of difficulties concretely experienced by one
of us within television production, and at a direct point of stress
and contradiction – the banning of a series of programmes. In the
sphere of reporting, for instance, television's arguments are in
terms of impartiality, but so equally are the usual counter-
arguments, which, by adopting those same terms for argument,
simply reproduce the system of constructed and available assent
on which television here depends: point of view versus impartiality,
impartiality as the balance of points of view, and so on; the whole
history of the *Viewpoint* series controversy is an exceptionally
clear example. The initial impetus for us was to break the con-
stant assumption of that circle and to move argument elsewhere,
to insert the question of television itself and to try to find ways
of demonstrating in its forms television's activity and of thinking
through from there implications for ideological struggle – whether
in connection with analysis of television and its programmes or
with strategies of production (a central concern: how to provide
tools for understanding for those attempting to work within tele-
vision from a critically radical position of some kind). The result
is this tentative beginning.

The procedure followed is that of the analysis of a single pro-
gramme. Such a procedure is absolutely necessary in that it is only
in the detailed consideration of particular instances that the
effective reality of television production can be grasped (it should
be noted, too, that there is an immediate intervention made, and a
potentially decisive gain to be won, with those working in tele-
vision, by the very fact of 'stopping' programmes, 'exposing'
them in all the detail of their functioning). At the same time, that
absolute necessity is so just because it is the precise and funda-
mental condition for the achievement of any theoretically con-
sequent general perspective on the nature of the television insti-
tution – what it institutes, the processes of its institutional ex-
ploitation, its existence as specific signifying practice.
What then is involved in the stress on the study of television as
specific signifying practice through attention to particular instances
of television production? *Signifying* indicates the recognition of
television as series of systems of meaning, television as articulation
and as perpetual realisation of significant effects. *Practice* lays
emphasis on the process of this articulation and this realisation,
in so doing undercutting the stable assumption of notions such
as 'representation' and 'expression', 'message' and 'trans-
mission': it takes television as a work of production of meanings
and effects, bringing into the analysis the question of the position-
ings of the viewer as subject within that work, the kinds of con-

10   struction and address of view and viewer. *Specific* marks the need
for analysis to grasp television in the particularity of the work it
engages, the differences and relations it sustains with other signi-
fying practices; specificity thus understood is semiotic, and a
semiotic analysis of television – of television as signifying practice
– is the analysis of a heterogeneity, the range of codes and systems
at work in television over and across its matters of expression
(speech, music, sound effects, writing, moving pictures); specificity,
that is, is at once those codes unique to television (or to television
and cinema) and the heterogeneity in its particular effects, its
particular inscriptions and movements of subject and meaning and
ideology. The last point is our distance from the ready equation of
television and cinema and from the coupling of that equation with
the idea of a single coherent language: 'Despite its massive
heterogeneity, there does seem to us a single, coherent language
of television to which all its different practices can be referred.
This language is, for all practical purposes, indistinguishable from
that of the cinema.'[2] Such a position begs all the questions, all
the work yet to be done: the single, coherent language would
have to be systematically defined and described (straight-off ideas
of this sort inevitably go no further than the confusion of codes
and systems with matters of expression, with a resulting appeal for
the elaboration of a ' formal aesthetic for the medium '), its indis-
tinguishability from that of cinema would have to be demonstrated
(cinema where systematic definition and description of codic com-
binations and the filmic operation of those combinations has anyway
tended against the characterisation of a single, coherent language),
and the practical purposes would have to receive clarification.
      For our practical purposes – those of the political necessity
for a close and constant attention to television and the develop-
ment of that attention theoretically by posing in analysis the
activity of television itself – certain preliminary formulations are
in order: television, like cinema, is characterised by codic hetero-
geneity, that ' heterogeneity of codes which is common to all
languages of any importance '[3] and which is not, of course, neces-
sarily opposed to the operation of effects of unity; television and
cinema can be seen as ' two technologically and socially distinct
versions of a single language ',[4] if language is there defined with
respect to the combination of matters of expression (' It seems to
me that one may call '' language '' a unity that is defined in terms
of matters of expression . . . thus '' language '' is a technico-
sensorial unity, immediately graspable in perceptual experience

2. S Hall: 'Television and culture', *Sight and Sound* Autumn 1976,
   p 249.
3. C Metz: *Langage et Cinéma*, Paris 1971, p 25 (*Language and
   Cinema*, The Hague 1974, p 36).
4. C Metz: Ibid, p 180 (Ibid, p 239).

. . . '⁵); theoretically, analytically, however, television and cinema are not to be confounded in some category of the audio-visual (the resource of a communication analysis: the form of an audio-visual discourse for the transmission of the content-message); the especially proximate relation of television and cinema (' in essence, cinema and television are nothing more than two neighbouring languages, but ones which push this relationship much further than is ordinarily done '; ' neighbouring languages ' being those ' which have in common a certain number of distinctive physical features and thus a certain number of specific codes '⁶) is so in the context of systems of differences, disjunctions, transformations, modifications that are part of the specificity to be analysed and that will be crucial for posing questions of the ideological function-ing of television. There may well be difficulties in the join of these formulations and it is in this context that the necessity of the procedure through attention to particular instances of television production imposes itself: that attention here is the attempt to show — to figure out, to bring out in their figures, their move-ments and rhythms and times — something of the codes and systems at work in that production, to turn back dialectically from there into more general theoretical problems of television, includ-ing that of the ' coherence ' of its ' language '.

The programme taken for analysis is a current affairs documentary report. This choice is not by chance: as was said earlier, most studies of television so far undertaken have been in or near that area of production, and wishing to displace somewhat the usual terms of analysis, it seemed important to demonstrate in the very same area everything that remains over unfocussed, left — damag-ingly — out of the account in such studies. In a simple sense, moreover, that area is a key one in television production: ' informa-tive ' programmes represent 39 per cent of the weekly trans-mission hours of the average ITV company and — or but — two-thirds of the production in ITV studios (ITV is cited as example since the programme to be discussed here is from one of its companies)⁷; current affairs, indeed, is in many ways, and is widely regarded as, an essentially television genre, ' a genre which scarcely existed before the coming of television . . . born of the use of documentary techniques to give greater depth, excitement or simply presence to the presentation of news '⁸, engaging as such the whole of television's rationale as ' the social visibility of social problems ', television in ' the business of communicating facts and

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5. C Metz: *Essais sur la signification au cinéma* II, Paris 1972, pp 207-8.
6. C Metz: *Langage et Cinéma*, p 179 (*Language and Cinema*, p 239).
7. IBA: *Handbook 1976*, pp 8, 11.
8. D Vaughan: *Television Documentary Usage* (BFI Television Mono-graph n 6), London 1976, p 4.

12 ideas' and of making that communication 'absorbing entertainment'.

Which last leads back to something of what remains over, left out of the account, in the usual analysis. The Independent Broadcasting Authority divides programmes into a number of categories: *sport, films, entertainment/music, plays/series/serials, children, education, religion, current affairs/documentaries, news/news magazines*; and these categories are taken as constituting two groups: informative, the last four, and (presumably) non-informative or entertaining, the others.[9] These divisions and groupings, however, are not to be merely accepted along with the organising oppositions they entail – fiction versus non-fiction, drama versus documentary, and so on. No matter how strong they may be, no matter how firmly supported by written or unwritten codes of practice (as is the case with current affairs and news magazine programmes), they need to be questioned from a consideration of television itself. What does it mean to say that, different, they are nevertheless all concerned with television, with *television* programmes? It seemed right to start from there in respect to an ' informative ', ' documentary ', ' report ' programme, and to ask: what is the institution of television in a current affairs programme? what follows for analysis, its terms, its general perspectives? for television studies and strategies?

The programme is from the Granada-produced *World in Action* current affairs series. Called *Yesterday's Truants*, it was shown nationally on Independent channels on Monday, November 1, 1976 at 8.30 pm and was seen in some 7 million homes (preceded by *George and Mildred* 9.2 million; followed by *The Sweeney* 9 million). As is normal with current-affairs and documentary programmes (and widespread, of course, in television production overall), it was made on film. It is worth noting that *World in Action* is often taken as an epitome of television achievement, not merely by the Granada company itself (' *World in Action*: Award-winning investigation teams range the world for the stories that will make tomorrow's headlines '[10]) but also in conventional critical histories and accounts (' there is no actuality programme on BBC so alive, experimental and up-to-the-minute as *World in Action* '; ' it was left to a commercial television company, Granada, to show that it was possible to inject passion into the television documentary with *World in Action* '[11]). The programme's history includes several clashes with the Authority over the ' due impartiality ' requirement

9. IBA: *Handbook 1976*, p 8.
10. Ibid, p 100.
11. T C Worsley: *Television: The Ephemeral Art*, London 1972, p 185; S Hood: *A Survey of Television*, London 1967, p 119.

as regards matters of political or industrial controversy or of
current public policy[12], and it is probably true to say that the pro-
gramme enjoys a certain reputation in television circles for hard-
hitting radicalism.

Yesterday's Truants, as the title suggests, is about truancy;
more exactly, it looks at three ex-truants, who are seen both as
they were ' yesterday ', when truants, the programme using material
from a previous *World in Action* programme about truancy, and as
they are now, in their adult life. At the end of the programme, the
Manchester Chief Education Officer – Granada is based in Man-
chester, and the truants were at a school near that city – gives
his views on the truants of yesterday as they are today and makes
some comments on truancy in the light of this *World in Action*
report. The programme is organised in four sections: I a prologue
in which the topic of the programme is stated, the idea of looking
at the three truants yesterday and today introduced; II a section
showing the truants yesterday; III a section showing the truants
today; IV the Education Officer's views and comments as a kind
of epilogue, with a brief coda made up of images from the pro-
gramme to finish. This organisation is set out in Figure I and it will
be noted that sections II and III form the bulk of the programme.

The analysis will be detailed but not ' exhaustive '; in particular, it
should be stressed that no attempt will be made to deal with the
level of ' social connotations ' so constantly and laboriously the
preoccupation of cultural studies, nor to point out at every turn
the defences, evasions, devices and impositions of the verbal dis-
course (commentary, interviewers' questions, Education Officer's
remarks, etc); as indicated above, the interest here will be more
specifically in television, in its movements, rhythms and times, its
structuring effects. Setting out the programme section by section,
we will offer a series of notations – often brief, sometimes frag-
mentary, occasionally digressive – on issues arising, leaving for
later one or two general considerations of some of those same
issues. One of the problems is precisely that of developing – of
finding how to write – a television analysis: the problem of analysis
will be present in the analysis of the programme that follows.

It remains only to mention two points that should be borne in
mind from the outset of, and during, the analysis of a single pro-
gramme. The first is that such an analysis could be argued to go
against the emphasis on flow powerfully advanced by Raymond
Williams as *the* television concept: ' the characteristic experience
is one of flow . . . perhaps the defining characteristic of broad-
casting, simultaneously as a technology and as a cultural form ';

12. Details in N Swallow: *Factual Television*, London 1966, pp 84-90;
see also P Black, *The Mirror in the Corner*, London 1972, pp 164-5.

14   the central fact of television experience, the fact of flow '.[13] The second is that it should be remembered that *World in Action* is a *series* (a term that cannot be reserved solely for the fictional-dramatic), programmed regularly from week to week; as a series, it represents a time-slot and, more than that, a constant repetition, the topics changing within a programme-pattern. These two points are related and it is important to grasp that relation, which is

Figure 1

[*World in Action* series titles – 0′ 10″]

SHOTS	TIME / SECTION TIME			
1	00′ 10″			
		2′ 18″	I	Prologue (brief introduction of truancy topic and of idea of programme via reference back to 1971 programme)
22				
23	02′ 28″			
		8′ 8″	II	The past (the three truants in 1971)
59				
60	10′ 36″			
		10′ 37″	III	The present (the three truants today)
109				
110	21′ 13″			
		3′ 58″	IV	Epilogue (interview with Chief Education Officer re present situation of the three and lessons to be drawn)
115				
116	25′ 11″			
		0′ 19″		Coda (brief montage of images I – III)
124				
	25′ 30″			
				[credits – 0′ 10″]
	25′ 40″			

13. R Williams: op cit, pp 86, 95. There is a flow-diagram which includes a 1971 *World in Action* (though the viewing figures are less than for the 1976 *Yesterday's Truants*) in B P Emmett: 'The television and radio audience in Britain', *Sociology of Mass Communications* ed D McQuail, Harmondsworth 1972, p 217.

perhaps missed by the over-exclusive emphasis on flow. The
' central fact of television experience ' is much less flow than
flow and regularity; the anachronistic succession is also a constant
reptition, and these terms of movement and stasis can be found
as well within the single programme as within the evening's view-
ing — or, at least, something of the terms of the latter can be
suggested in analysis of the former.

ANALYSIS OF THE PROGRAMME

Note: The conventions adopted for shot description are BCU — big
close-up, head only; CU — close-up, head and shoulders; MCU —
medium close-up, head and chest; MCS — medium close shot,
includes body approximately from waist up; MS — medium shot, hip
to head of upright figures; LS — long shot, full height of body;
VLS — very long shot, figures small in frame. Shot times are given
in seconds. Unless otherwise stated, transitions between shots are
cuts, and voices are synch.

Section I — Prologue (2 minutes, 18 seconds)

Shot	Time	Description	Dialogue and commentary
1	18.5	LS boys framed coming down alleyway towards camera; leading boy comes close up, looks off as voice over; cut as he ' wipes ' past camera.	Teachers' voices off: ' Slater . . . '/' Brown . . . Bury . . . '/' Campbell . . . Eliot . . .
2	6	MCU youngish teacher reading register, looks off after each name.	. . . Ferguson . . . Gartland . . . Green . . . Gregg . . . (voice now synch)
3	4	LS classroom, near teacher's POV, matched with direction look off in 2.	. . . Jones . . . Kurvitz . . . Knox . . . (voice off)
4	2	CU teacher, slight pull out as look up after name.	. . . M . . . (synch)
5	2	LS classroom, as 3.	. . . No, Keith never gets up, does he? ' (voice off)

6	6.5	MS Keith sitting up in bed, looking off screen left (direction of questions).	Interviewer off: 'What time will you get up today? ' Keith: 'I'll probably get up about half two to three.' Interviewer off: 'Are you going to go into school? ' Keith: 'No.'
7	4	MS pupils at desks in second classroom.	Second teacher off (= second voice in 1): 'Rupert Davis . . . Lorna Davis . . . Linda E. . . .
8	2.5	MCU second teacher, older, looking up from register.	. . . Anyone seen Linda E.? '
9	6.5	CU Linda at home, looks off screen left (direction of questions).	Linda: ' I knew, you know, I wouldn't learn anything else and I wouldn't help myself, so I thought it's not worth going in.'
10	4.75	MCU first teacher, as 2.	First teacher: 'H. . . . No. When, er, has anyone seen Vincent over the holidays? '
11	6.75	BCU Vincent at home.	Vincent: ' I was going to school on and off for a long time back, but just before Christmas I stopped going to school.'
12	16	LS playground, few boys waiting and moving about.	Commentary over: ' March 1971: a secondary school near Manchester. Five years ago *World in Action* looked at the growing problem of truancy in schools. A report by the Manchester Education Department had shown that absenteeism in secondary schools
13	16	LS same playground from slightly different angle to 12; crowds of children coming through gates and close up into camera to exit into school door screen left.	was increasing and that every day in Manchester 3,000 children were absent with little justification. In that programme five years ago, we calculated from the Manchester figures that throughout Britain a quarter of a million children were playing truant every day.
14	11	MS interior, boys coming through swing doors in school.	But since then the school-leaving age has been raised from 15 to 16, and now a new survey by the National Children's Bureau shows that more than

15	6	LS interior, darkish corridor in school, children.	half of all children in their last year admit to having stayed away from school at some time when they should have been there.
16	6	LS interior, light corridor, boys coming down towards camera, larking about.	Five years ago *World in Action* talked to three truants in their last year in
17	3	Three-shot, Welfare Officer, a second woman, a man, seated at table with papers.	school. Their truancy was a major problem for the Schools Welfare Officer
18	4.5	CU Welfare Officer.	whose job is to see that pupils don't skip school. Tonight *World in Action* returns
19	3	BCU Vincent, as 11.	to the truants of 1971 to
20	2	Dissolve to CU Linda, as 9.	look back at what they were like then
21	4	Dissolve to MS Keith, as 6; zoom in to CU.	and to see what effect playing truant has had on their lives since they left school
22	3	Caption: Yesterday's Truants.	

Obviously, the function of this first section is to open the pro-gramme. That function, however, is twofold: the section must say what the programme is about and at the same time present the idea of the programme itself, the latter throughout effectively holding and determining the former.

The programme is concerned with truancy; as document, as report, its impetus is outside television, is in the world in action to which it declares itself a response; the impetus is general – the problem of truancy – and particular, *actual* – the school-leaving age recently raised from 15 to 16 and ' *now* ' a ' *new* ' survey by the National Children's Bureau. Yet this invoked outside cause here exists only in terms of the idea of the programme, which is, simply and immediately, *television*. The shift, a constant of television's productions, is especially apparent in *Yesterday's Truants* – one of the reasons why the programme will allow a number of issues to be raised with relative ease and speed – in that it does not just make truancy the point of a television production, produce truancy for television, but anyway begins from another television pro-gramme: *World in Action* November 1976 comes out of *World in Action* March 1971. The progress through the commentary (shots 12-21) to the title (shot 22) sets out exactly the programme's strategy: the interest is yesterday's truants today, the whole idea

18   of the programme is the televisual recovery-demonstration-articu-
lation of the *yesterday-today*; the organisation, both overall and
local, poses truancy with regard only to that idea, though attempt-
ing, in the shifting balance of topic and determination, to derive
it from, to return it to the general problem of truancy, which is
the programme's responsibility and guarantee.

The movement of the programme works out the organisation
*thus defined: the idea determines, the problem guarantees; the
one doubled over the other which it carries on with it.* Such an
organising movement, however, is the possibility in its process of
a range of times and rhythms, a multiplicity of levels of operation
and patterns of engagement, continually relayed and relaying.
' Good television ' plays on that possibility, on the range and
multiplicity, to ' make a programme ', to achieve its effectiveness
and effects (ideological functioning depending as much on the
former as on this or that effect). The – a – programme moves
also in moments, brief turns and scenes, micro-systems, diversify-
ing and binding: television, perpetually, the singular plural.

The choice of two boys and a girl has, of course, its reasons, one
of which is the clear and mnemonically satisfying pattern of boy-
girl-boy that it allows and that is followed in each of the first three
sections (' choice ' here refers not to an individual decision but to
the logic of the *television programme*). In the present section, the
pattern is established through the ' little dramatic scene ' intro-
duction of the three truants, the missing-when-teacher-calls-the-
register device repeated for Keith, Linda, and Vincent in shots 2-6,
7-9, 10-11 respectively – the number of shots decreases as the
device becomes familiar, reduced to the basic articulation of the
cut from absence in school to the absent truant. Evidently, that
device has resonances beyond its dramatisation of the introduction
– the cut, for example, works towards a certain regime of know-
ledge and credibility: the programme knows more than the teacher,
and the viewer will know with it – but the parallelism it gives, its
symmetrifying power, is also, perhaps initially, an important factor
in starting the coherence into which the programme constantly
runs. Crucial to the coherence is the setting of the three truants as
immediate images, for television, and the calling/finding of the
three in turn points out at once those needed images; images
which can then be cast at the end of the section – shots 19, 20,
21 dissolved into one another – into the punctuation-transition
figure for dividing-linking the sections, the very figure of the pro-
gramme's movement: this programme is about truancy but only
for, and from, the idea of yesterday-today, with the three individual
truants thus providing, as images, its constant turn.

Between the parallelistic introduction of the truants and the result-
ing figure at the end of the section, the programme states topic

and idea in a voice-over commentary which runs across shots 12-18
and, in fact, continues until the close of that final figure. This
commentary is read — ie written, scripted (hence the ease with
which it falls back into sentences in the transcription given here) —
and is, effectively, the *protocol* of the programme. The problem for
television as institution of images is then the constraint of the
image, its ideological currency constantly to be maintained: the
commentary must be accompanied, the screen *filled*. Hence the
descriptive passage produced in shots 12-18, a series of accom-
panying images ' in school '; a passage exactly in the sense of a
piece that is there to help get through, to pass between the intro-
duction of the truants and the real beginning of the programme
(of its idea) in Section II after the title caption of shot 22.

It is not merely by chance that the images themselves are all
images of moments of passage — school children going through
doorways, coming down corridors — since they are there minimally,
to be appropriately (' in school ') insignificant. They fill in, make
a passage, in order to show nothing; so that they mean significantly
by virtue of what they leave out and avoid — ' in school ', but with
no signs of children working or doing anything in particular; ' in
school ' but with no signs of which school, what circumstances,
and so on, no signs of any social analysis, indeed no information
(the viewer has no way of knowing whether the images are of one
school or several, whether they are images of the truants' school
or schools, whether the truants went to the same school). The
space is entirely that of a passage, of the succession of images
for a time (or times: of the commentary, of television), not that
of the analysis of a reality.

The question of time and times, of temporality, will be important
throughout this series of reflections; one or two initial remarks
can be made at once in this connection with regard to the passage
images just described.

The idea of the programme is yesterday-today: two programmes,
1971 and 1976, with the latter including and building on the
former; two main sections — II and III — which are the precise
articulation of the idea, ' The past ' and ' The present '. That articu-
lation has no existence except in terms of the individual truants —
Vincent, Linda, Keith yesterday: Vincent, Linda, Keith today — who
in turn have no existence except in the articulation, as the present
of this programme — *now* look at Vincent, Linda, Keith yesterday:
now look at Vincent, Linda, Keith today. The present of the pro-
gramme has a constant autonomy that is constantly composed,
made up of a shifting multiplicity of times specified at a variety
of levels. The ' passage ' images furnish one brief and simple
example within this multiplicity in so far as they indicate its base
in the moving-but-composed television present. Merely a passage,
those images are atemporal, temporally unmarked — is shot 12 from

20 1971 or from 1976? That question is no question for the programme: the image is no more than 'there', absorbed in its television function *to be present*.

Some basic rules: 'Writing for television needs to be easy and colloquial in style . . . the script must never seem to be written or read . . . of course, one cannot afford the looseness of real conversational speech: the words must be organised with care and economy, but they must *sound* easy and spontaneous '.[14] Certainly, as was said, the commentary over in this section was written and read. Such anteriority, effectively sustained, would break the television present; the 'in school' passage serves, therefore, to reverse that anteriority: images are proposed as the actuality of the commentary, the latter following them — it hardly matters what images as long as they always appear as the *cause*.

The looseness of real conversational speech cannot be afforded. The appeal of a programme like *Yesterday's Truants*, however, is, of course, exactly to 'real conversational speech'; this, indeed, is part of its radicalism — a document which lets the truants speak. Later, we shall have to note not simply the effects of the alternation of speech with commentary, but also the stylisation and organisation of speech within the very temporal composition of the programme idea: the truants speak for the programme, in no way 'for themselves '.

'The golden rule is — begin with action and with people . . . then everything depends on narrative — the stage by stage unfolding of a story, building to a climax and a conclusion. . . .'[15] *Yesterday's Truants* adheres to the golden rule for its opening: an atmosphere-theme shot with a certain amount of movement (shot 1); then the little roll-call dramas to introduce the three people, the human interest (shots 2-11); then a statement presenting the narrative to come, the story of the truants yesterday and today (shots 12-22).

'The viewer must be propelled through the cut, however gently.'[16] There will be no need to comment at length on the details of the editing in each of the sections: the classic practices of film editing for narrative continuity are in evidence throughout, as are the simplest kinds of cutting on spoken word/image relations (shots 5/6, 8/9, 10/11, down to the straight specification cut of 17/18).

'Not only the action, but also the viewpoint must have continuity.'[17] Gently propelled through the cut in a progressive continuity, the viewer is given, precisely, a view, and follows out the

14. R Tyrrell: *The Work of the Television Journalist,* London 1972, pp 31-2.
15. Ibid, pp 32-3.
16. Ibid, p 73.
17. Ibid, p 63.

sense and direction of the narrative. This close relation in the narrative, however, must be simultaneously balanced by the developing creation of an overall view, a mastery *of the programme*. In the brief action of finding Vincent, Linda, and Keith in this section, the viewer is placed in the enounced (the truants discovered), in the enunciation (the narration of the discovery), *and* in the setting of the unity of the two, the programme's process-and-position.

Section II – The past (8 minutes, 8 seconds)

Shot	Time	Description	Dialogue and commentary
23	4.5	Three-shot, Welfare Officer, woman, and man, as 17.	Welfare Off.: ' There's one here that I'm concerned about.'
24	14.5	Two-shot, Welfare Officer and man, going in to man as he speaks.	Man: ' Well, I think we've tried everything in the book for this laddie. He's been aggressive all through school, his lower school report indicates trouble all the way through, running out of school, refused punishment.'
25	27	MS low angle Vincent with rifle perched on chair; Alsatian dog sitting and then moving in and out in foreground, tail wagging across screen.	Commentary over: ' The first truant: Vincent. At 15 he had developed an aimless routine that didn't allow any time for school.' Vincent voice over: ' Well, when I don't go to school, and during the day I usually sleep, and then it's at night when I'm awake and I find things to do, like shooting the mice.'
26	4	Close detail shot of Vincent's hand on rifle, camera pans slightly.	We have a big washing machine, and the mice seem to congregate,
27	2	BCU Vincent, aiming.	congregate round the washing machine,
28	4	Washing machine, slight high angle, seen from near POV Vincent aiming.	so I usually sit there until I kill one. If I can't hit one

Shot	Time	Description	Dialogue and commentary
29	19	BCU Vincent, aiming; slow pan left along rifle barrel to hold end of barrel.	I wait for another one to come. It gets boring sometimes, and I just start drilling holes in something, or I go shooting out the bedroom window.
30	15	MS Vincent, as 25; zoom in at close to BCU.	'Bout seven o'clock in the morning I go to bed; and I usually get up about six or seven o'clock at night and sit down and watch the television, wait for everyone to go to bed, and then I start shooting the mice again,
31	1.5	Washing machine, as 28; zoom in	that's it.'
32	3	BCU Vincent, as at close of 30; cut on sound of shot.	
33	1	Washing machine, as at close of 31; mouse runs across.	
34	48	Two shot Vincent and mother sitting side by side on sofa screen left; slow zoom in after 'toilets' to BCU Vincent.	Vincent: ' I had troubles in the lower school about something that had happened with some of the boys in the cloakrooms, in the toilets, er, some boys had got a second-year boy's bag, and had been playing about with it; and chucked the stuff down the toilet, that was in the bag; and then me and this other lad who was in the toilets, and we got, the teacher says " I won't do owt about you being here," because we wasn't, we're not, supposed to be in the toilets during break, in them certain toilets, and he says " I won't do owt about it, but if you tell me who the lads were," and we wouldn't tell him.
35	11	Two shot Vincent and mother, as at beginning of 34.	He took out the strap, and he says " put your hands out," and he just went to hit me with it, and I

Shot	Time	Description	Dialogue and commentary
			moved my hands out of the way and I told him to kiss me arse and walked out the school.'
36	34.5	BCU Vincent; pan during question on 'Vincent' from Vincent to CU mother.	Interviewer off: 'Do you think in any way at all you encouraged Vincent to buck against authority?' Mother: 'Maybe I have, yes, because I do it myself. I know I do it; like I, now I can talk about it, but if something comes up at the time I definitely know that I do. I hate people who are very officious and think they, they know what to do and what not to do, and you know nothing. You get a lot of these type of people around.'
37	8.5	MCU Welfare Officer.	Welfare Off: 'There, there's Linda E., now she's off an awful lot.'
38	8	Detail shot Welfare Officer's hands; tilt up to CU face, reaction to 'nitwits'.	Woman off: 'She was reported all through lower school as considering that most teachers were absolute nitwits [laughter]; she found school a bit of a drudge.'
39	25	MS-MCU Linda walking between gravestones in cemetery from screen right to left, camera tracking with her; cut as gravestone comes – 'wipes' – between camera and her.	Commentary over: 'The second truant: Linda. At 15 she'd recovered from a bout of meningitis, but still used the illness as an excuse for staying off school'. Linda voice over: 'When I don't go to school and it's a nice day, we'll go walking in Southern cemetery, you know walking through and that, read the gravestones. After about you're 13, school's a waste of time. You're older, you want to do things, you know, older people do.
40	14.5	MCU-MS Linda walking through clothes boutique from screen left to right.	You seem, you know, you've passed it now. You're passed it all going to school now, and you

Shot	Time	Description	Dialogue and commentary
			want to get a job cause, you know, you go to a senior school and your parents let you stay out later at night, and they let you wear make-up,
41	1	MCU Linda trying on clothes, looking down off screen right.	
42	3	Linda and friend seen in mirror, high angle; fast pan and tilt up to their faces; man behind turns.	so, you feel all big,
43	3	Linda's legs in trouser-skirt; pan up body to hold hips, then bust and face low angle.	you know, and you got to go back to school again, you know, you don't
44	1	Over shoulder shot from behind Linda down to her reflection in mirror, new outfit; slight pan.	like it.'
45	6	Torso shot of Linda turned to mirror off; pan and tilt up to MCU, friend entering frame.	
46	61.5	Three-shot Linda, mother, little boy on lap, at home; zoom in to Linda at ' I was sick ' and in to BCU at ' So you just '; pan across from Linda to BCU mother at Linda's ' Sometimes '.	Mother: ' Well first was the illness, meningitis, and then ...' Interviewer off: ' Didn't she stay off school at all before the meningitis? ' Mother: ' No, not really.' Interviewer off: ' Is that right, Linda? ' Mother: ' Unless it was unknown to me.' Interviewer off: ' Did you stay off school before you had meningitis? ' Linda: ' Yes.' Interviewer off: ' How often did you stay off school, then? ' Linda: ' Twice a week.' Interviewer off: ' Why was that? ' Linda: ' I was sick of school, I didn't like it.' Interviewer off: ' So you just use the fact that you

Shot	Time	Description	Dialogue and Commentary
			had meningitis as an excuse now? ' Linda: 'Yes.' Interviewer off: 'Do you think your mother thinks you really are ill? ' Linda: 'Sometimes.' Mother: 'Sometimes I think, you know, is she playing on it, or is it genuine. I'm always frightened in case it is genuine and I make her go.'
47	23.5	BCU Keith, from same bed scene as 6, 21.	Keith: 'Half the stuff they teach you at school you'll never use when you're working.' Commentary over: 'The third truant: Keith. An unmarried father at 15, he felt there was nothing more to be learnt from school' Keith: 'Like maths, and when you do hard sums like tangents and logarithms and indices and all these you'll never use when you're working.'
48	15.5	MS Keith in bed, as 6, 21.	Interviewer off: 'What sort of things do your parents say to you when they know you're not going to school? ' Keith: 'They don't say much, they just say make sure you're in school tomorrow, and I'll phone up and make sure you are in, and sometimes I still don't usually go after that:
49	9	MS-VLS Keith and friend seen from low angle climbing over railings; camera follows Keith; he runs off into distance.	Sometimes I go back in school at dinner time, wait for 'em to have their dinner, and when they come out
50	10.5	VLS-MS Keith and friend walking along railway track towards camera; cut as they come up past camera.	pick up some of my friends, ask them do they want to stay off and if they do, I'll go out with them and we'll spend the afternoon fooling around, you know; walking around do something,

Shot	Time	Description	Dialogue and Commentary
51	4	Close shot of tin can, stones hitting it.	
52	11	VLS Keith and friend seen from low angle sitting on pile of sleepers throwing stones towards camera at can in extreme foreground.	or I'll go up to the library and read some books, any books, science sometimes, or the morning papers. I think I've a good education up to now, and I don't need any more."
53	33.75	Three-shot Keith screen left, mother and father screen right, sitting at home; zoom in to two-shot mother and father 'There is no way '; pan across to MCU Keith at 'What would happen '.	Mother: ' Everything he wants to do, he does it. We can't do much, he must have his own way.' Interviewer off: ' There is no way you can persuade him that he ought to go to school? ' Mother: ' No, they've even suggested me taking him to school.' Interviewer off: ' What would happen if your mother did that, Keith? ' Keith: ' I don't know; I'd go in, get my mark, and go out, really, don't know.' Mother: ' Well, it would really be ,
54	4.5	BCU mother	silly taking him to school, after all he's a father, I mean, he's got a child of his own.'
55	24.5	BCU Keith; pan round and pull out at end of question to two-shot mother and father.	Interviewer off: ' Do you think there's anything anybody can do now before Keith leaves school to persuade him to go back and continue to go? ' Mother: ' I'm hoping he does go back.' Father: ' Well, he's only got approximately about a month to do now, I mean surely his own conscience should make him go for the last month, at least.'
56	20.25	BCU mother.	Mother: ' Especially when he's just starting work, they want to know what kind of a boy he was and his attendance, I mean that will go against him, as bad

Shot	Time	Description	Dialogue and Commentary
			as being in prison, I think. You know, you can't get a job once you've been in prison, so they can't get any job because of playing truancy all the time. I mean, they want somebody reliable, don't they, in these jobs.'
57	3.5	BCU Vincent, from Vincent and mother scene 34 on: as 19.	Commentary over: 'Keith, Linda, and Vincent. Five years ago, they were all regular,
58	4	Dissolve to CU Linda, from Linda and mother scene 46; as 20.	persistent, and determined truants. This year, when we set out to find them again,
59	3.5	Dissolve to MS Keith, as 21.	we didn't know what to expect, and we were in for some surprises.

The second section is the first part of the crucial yesterday-today articulation, the very idea of the programme; it gives us the past in anticipation of the present to come, just as the third section will give us the present in retrospection of the past here recalled. The section's function is thus to remember the 1971 programme and its three truants for this programme now. Accordingly, it follows the basic boy-girl-boy compositional figure in the interests of a balance that is both local, the coherence of the particular section, and overall, the construction of the section for subsequent resolution by another section that will rhymingly repeat and complete it.

The three truants are found one by one in a reiterated pattern: a little scene of 'the truant playing truant' succeeded by a little interview-cum-dialogue scene with parents or parent (Vincent: shots 25-33/34-36; Linda: shots 39-45/46; Keith: shots 47-52/ 53-56). These scenes, above all the former, provide a simple indication of the multiplicity that characterises the programme's movement: each has its structural function in the definition of the overall time of the programme, the developed unity; each has its own time and unity, available for different kinds of attention, meaning, and enjoyment; each responds at once to the fact of television as institution of the image – the necessity to show something, to fill the screen – and to the fact of the recognition of the viewer in that institution as a point for shifting regulation – the necessity to operate a certain variety within the constant flow of the same, to produce a number of times and positions as the maintenance of *the* time and position of *the programme*. It is in this

context that the appearance of the individual scenes of the truants should be finally understood.

The scene for Keith is a clear instance of what is immediately involved ideologically in the institution of the image. As 'report' or 'document', the claimed strategy of the programme is to allow the truants to declare themselves 'in their own words'. Insofar as it be taken no further than the tautology that the words spoken in the programme by the truants were effectively spoken by them (and leaving aside all discussion of the ideology of person and presence at work in the notion of people's 'own words'), then the claim is true (though it will be seen later how the words spoken are given by the programme in *its* time, not the truants'). Precisely to the extent to which the claim in these terms is true, however, a problem can arise for the composition of a television scene and this is particularly evident in the presentation of Keith-the-truant. Keith, that is, has a critically articulate position with regard to school and his truancy (much of what is taught in school is irrelevant, he already possesses an adequate education and anyway can learn by reading on his own) and consequently speaks a language that is less telescenic, less manageable for the determined and determining criteria of the visually interesting little narrative scene. Hence the absolute contradiction between what Keith says he does, 'I'll go up to the library and read some books, science sometimes, or the morning papers', and what he is shown doing, throwing stones at a tin can, in shot 52, the final image of Keith playing truant. The conception of visual interest determines, not the spoken words; and that determination here, just because of the resistance of the words, can do nothing but fall back on the easiest available stereotype. Keith's scene is straight out of *Just William*: the stone-throwing schoolboy. That stereotype furnishes a spectacle but without fully meeting the requirements of the spectacular which are part of the determination of visual interest; indeed, it goes contrary to the only element of the spectacular that the programme finds to create as such: Keith 'an unmarried father at 15'. Not mentioned by Keith in his statements on school and truancy, this element has to be literally inserted on the sound track in shot 47, fading out Keith's words for the logic of the commentary over: 'an unmarried father at 15, he felt there was nothing more to be learnt from school'. The *programme's* stress returns later with the cut to the big close-up of the mother at shot 54 for her 'after all he's a father'.

Even if one accepts the notion of 'their own words' (against the evidence just cited of an example of the breaking and distortion of those words), the question would still remain of 'their own images'. What the scene for Keith quickly shows is that the images here are never those of the truants. These images exist to make a scene, a scene for itself and for the programme, a unity and a unit.

The supposed image of the actual is simply the actuality of the image *for television*; the commitment is to that.

Keith is balanced in the section by Vincent. Up to a point, the point heavily circumscribed by the setting to images and the appeal to an element such as unmarried fatherhood, the programme needs something of Keith's articulate position which permits a certain effect of ' the truant's point of view ' and offers a certain edge of debate (the position can be put to the Education Officer for comment at the end of the programme). It is not by chance, however, that the section begins its scenes with Vincent, the ideal attraction, the possibility of a perfect scene.* The first shot (25, still 1) pulls instantly into the dramatically bizarre — Vincent perched with his rifle, the dog howling and wiping its tail across the screen, the low angle, the lighting with the heavy shadow of Vincent on the wall — and this atmosphere is continued — as, for example, in the slow pan along the rifle to hold the end of the barrel (shot 29, still 2). Once again, these are in no way Vincent's images; they are the images of a composed scene for the viewer (who must be quickly seized — ' begin with action . . .'). Hence the organisation with its structured climax in the firing of the shot and its editing strictly for that climax: the final alternating montage and the rhythmically and spatially symmetrical zoom-in movements (shots 30-33). Vincent is staged, and it is this staging that is important, even at the cost of a potential loss of the guarantee of documentary credibility (the over-obliging mouse).
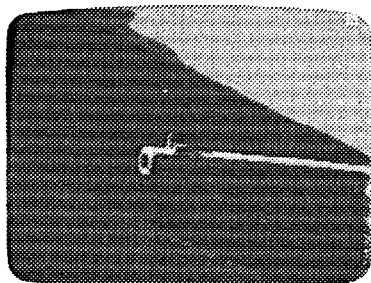
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What has the close-up of the end of a rifle to do with the problem of truancy? The question is impossible for the programme — and for *its* viewer — where the only question is, exactly, the programme itself, with ' only ' the term of an ideological operation: the scene but the scene *set*; for Vincent, as for the others, the programme gives the ' truant playing truant ' scene *first* —

* The obvious should perhaps be emphasised: nothing in the present discussion in any way bears on Keith, Linda and Vincent themselves; the scope of all comments is solely that of the television presentation of the three.

30　whatever they might be able to say, the truants will always be set in that presentation.

Between Vincent and Keith, Linda: the pretty girl in the middle. If with Keith the presentation resorts to an easy stereotype against a difficult case and with Vincent produces its stereotype of 'the dramatic', then with Linda it achieves absolute inevitability, a kind of optimum degree of functioning in which the particular stereotype is from the start an image, a specific mise-en-scène of the body, the term of a look.
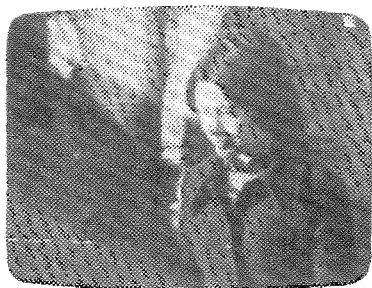
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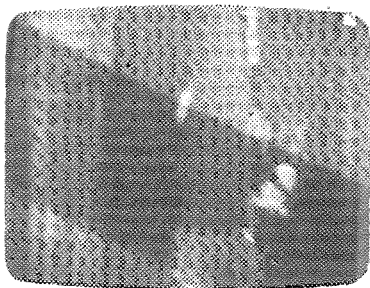
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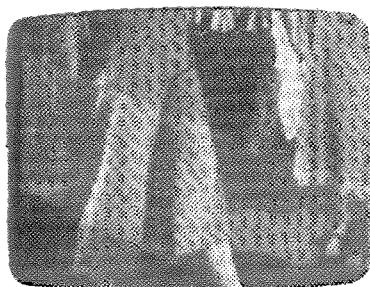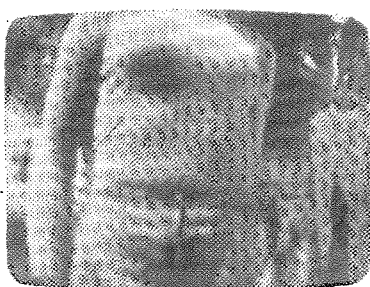
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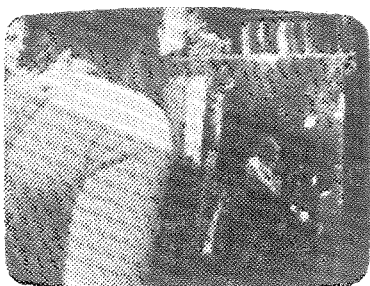
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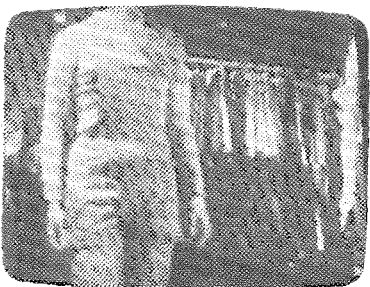
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For the programme, Linda is a truant and a body to be shown,
the pure spectacle – nothing, of course, of even the minimal narra-
tive action set up in the scenes with the boys (shooting mice,
throwing stones) – for which the boutique provides the required
theatrical space. To an increasingly dominating and rhythmically
stressed modish music (the sole use of music in the programme),
Linda is thus exhibited in some few seconds in three different out-
fits, her body detailed, mirrored in image for the viewer's gaze
(shots 40-45, stills 4-13). Not surprisingly, mirror and look make
their thematic appearance in the scene, the very inscription of its
theatre of the body shown: shot 42 begins with a high angle view
of Linda's and her friend's reflection (still 6) and then rapidly pans
and tilts up to their faces while a young man in the centre back-

ground turns towards them, the look at the spectacle, and thereby towards us, the specular instance of our gaze, our position as viewers (still 7). Not surprisingly again, it is in this scene that the programme proposes its fanciest demonstrations of construction, editing, and camera work: for the first, one can note the dynamics of temporal ellipsis, the speed of the movement from one outfit to the next (1, shots 41-42, stills 5-7; 2, shot 43, stills 8-10; 3, shots 43-45, stills 11-13); for the second, the rapid cutting generally, and more particularly the cut into the scene from shot 39 to shot 40 (stills 3 and 4) which passes from Linda obscured by a gravestone to Linda obscured by hanging dresses against the continuity of – reversing – her direction of movement; and for the third, the pan and tilt up from the mirror reflection already mentioned, the tilts up Linda's body (shots 43 and 46, stills 8-10 and 12-13), the high and low angles, etc. In fact, the style here is close to that of pop music programmes and it is significant enough that the music heard under Linda's comments should eventually replace them altogether to allow the scene its true climax (shots 44-45). Like the other scenes, but more so (the optimum degree of functioning), this scene has its own television autonomy, its own time and unity; with its structural role in the programme (the girl between the two boys in the compositional figure, the equivalence with the scenes for Vincent and Keith, the anticipation of the scene of Linda today) it is also, in its very fulfilment of that role, a detachable part, an absolute moment of spectacle with special terms of attention, meaning, and enjoyment for the viewer – terms which are none other than those of television's ordinary sexism.

Another basic rule: 'The selection of people to illustrate a subject is crucial. . . .'[18] People must be selected *for television*, available for its images, its scenes, its spectacle, like Vincent or Linda. One might point here to the interview with the Palestinian woman in Godard's *Ici et ailleurs* that is followed by a black screen and a woman's voice describing the staging of the interview-scene, questioning the film-maker – 'what's more, she's good-looking, but you say nothing about that, the kind of silence that goes quickly with fascism'. At every point in *Yesterday's Truants*, we need to insert such a gap in the image, such a voice; the voice and the gap that selection-for-illustration is there to cover over.

The 'truant playing truant' scenes are completed in each case by a scene in the home, the truant with parent or parents (shots 34-36, 46, 53-56). Evidently, the programme here signifies its sociological impetus, its status as document with a proper stress on the study of family relations: equally evidently, it furnishes no elements of analysis and emerges with a single and predictable signified

18. Colin Young: '*The Family*', *Sight and Sound* Autumn 1974, p 208.

drawn from common sense opinion: lack of parental control and
responsibility. More interesting to note is the peculiar fiction
involved. We are here offered the opportunity to see for ourselves
the family situation *at first hand* (heightened by the *World in*
Action strategy of having no representative of television visible).
It is conventionally easy to add – so conventional that the pro-
gramme would have no problem with this – that of course there is
'mediation', things are 'set up', etc. What is much less con-
ventionally easy is to grasp that the 'at first hand' is always *from*
the start a specific ideological conception, a specific construction
in a specific mode of argument and demonstration. The programme
would have problems with this insofar as its recognition would
imply a critical reflection not simply on the determinations of its
definition and functioning as 'document' but equally, beyond that
though caught up in it, on the whole implication of television
itself in an ideology of the possibility of the 'direct', the 'im-
mediate', 'the world brought to us'.

World in Action has a reputation for being somewhat subversive.
Take, for instance, shots 36 and 37. Avoiding commentary (the
impression produced but which is false at so many points – witness
the 'unmarried father' interjected in shot 47), showing and letting
speak, the programme is right up with the truants and their situa-
tion; thus in shot 36 Vincent's mother complements his story of
the strap incident in shots 34-35 (itself the answer the programme
allows him to the refusing-punishment-and-running-out-of-school
accusation made by the man in shot 24) with her anti-authoritarian
position. That position is then followed up and adopted by the
editing: from Vincent's mother's 'I hate people who are very
officious . . . you get a lot of these type of people around' we are
cut to a medium close-up of the Welfare Officer busy with the next
case, given by the cut as an example of the officious official.
The subversion, however, is no more than that of a complicit joke:
the viewer is accorded a position of superiority *over a person,*
over this woman, not in relation to any analysis of a system. The
localisation is crucial: moments of subversion, terms of a signified
radicalism – moments and terms in fact deeply embedded in the
most reactionary stereotypes: as here, where it is not by chance
that a woman is the object of the cut – that can be instantly
checked and redeemed within a general organisation that depends
on the structure of authority it purports to run against – hence,
most obviously, the instatement of an official authority in person
and voice, the Chief Education Officer, to close the programme.

More basic rules: ' In films and television, the viewer does not make
his own decision about what to look at; it is made for him, and
he will soon become irritated, bored or confused if he is not well

14   15

served. If the cuts are good, he will usually be unaware of them.'[19] This section, typically, has a high proportion of shots that are close-ups or medium close-ups (or that contain close-ups or medium close-ups). The poor definition of the television image ensures reliance where possible on a relative closeness of shots but that reliance-where-possible is a certain commitment of meaning, a certain definition of understanding. What is given so often in the present section is a drama of faces, little instants of sought-for revelation – a mother who discovers the extent and strategies of her daughter's truancy in an exchange ' before our eyes ' (shot 46, stills 14-16). Cutting and camera movement follow and produce the drama for the viewer, unobtrusive in that following production, the expression of dialogue.

The problem is *holding* the viewer, serving him or her with positions, providing a constant direction; hence the patterns of drama, the little instants, the editing for that and for those. A problem, in fact, of balance: not enough mobility to disrupt, just sufficient not to lose the hold; ' the static picture's attraction falls fairly quickly, lending itself readily to private speculation '.[20] No doubt it is easy to raise objections to the formulation but it is in this context that one can understand why for a Godard the fundamental urgency should become the question of the fascisisation of mass communications.

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19. Tyrrell: op cit, p 73.
20. Millerson: op cit, p 278.

Shot	Time	Description	Dialogue and commentary
60	4.5	Dissolve to MS Vincent with rifle, as 30.	Commentary over continues from 59: Vincent was the easiest to find. Five years ago he had been
61	2	Washing machine, as 31.	labelled aggressive at school,
62	3	BCU Vincent, as 32.	and at home he spent his days shooting at mice.
63	1	Washing machine and mouse, as 33.	
64	3	Dissolve to CU Vincent 1976.	Today Vincent is 20 and still
65	6	VLS high angle, Vincent seen at top of steps of slide in housing estate playground, child going up steps.	lives in Manchester. He's been in trouble with the police on a number of occasions. For the first three years after leaving
66	3.75	Close shot over Vincent's shoulder as he puts child down slide; Vincent's wife seen at bottom.	school Vincent was out of work for most of the time, and his recreation
67	3	Child seen from bottom coming down slide, wife picks him up.	didn't stop at shooting mice
68	13	MCU Vincent's mother 1976; interior.	Mother: ' When he was in a temper, he would kick the door and break it and make sure it was broken. He didn't just kick a door, he broke it, you know, and throwing things about, throw a sauce bottle up the wall; things like this type of thing'
69	19.25	CU Vincent; interior.	Vincent: ' I think this might be one of the main reasons I used to go burglaring, 'cost when I went burglaring I used to smash the places up and all sorts of things like that. Smash windows and things like this, and in the house I used to get tempers and smash things.'

Shot	Time	Description	Dialogue and commentary
70	16.5	CU Vincent (slightly looser than 69); interior.	Interviewer off: 'What happened to you then?' Vincent: 'Well, I was in remand homes for a long time, and I was sent to detention centre one time, and to borstal another time.'
71	2.25	Two-shot Vincent and mother sitting side by side on sofa screen left.	Interviewer off: 'Did you try and get a job?'
72	53	CU Vincent, as 70.	Vincent: 'Yes, I tried a number of times to get jobs. I had a job as an apprentice hairdresser one time. I told them about my police record; so when I started in the morning, it was alright, and I went through till the evening when it was nearly time to go home; and I was called into the office and I was given an envelope with a couple of pound in it; and they said, with having so many small things, like hair-dryers and things like this, blow-wavers and things, that it were easy to put in your pocket or in a bag, and with my record they didn't think it was any good for me to be there, in case anything went.' Interviewer off: 'So the job lasted one day?' Vincent: 'Yes' Interviewer off: 'What about your other jobs?' Vincent: 'They all lasted one day.'
73	2.5	Two-shot Vincent and child (son) at top of slide, as at end of 65.	Commentary over: 'After three frustrating
74	3.25	Close shot from behind Vincent at top of slide as he puts son down slide, as 66.	years, Vincent got married and began to settle down.
75	3.25	Side-on shot of bottom of slide as son comes down; pull out to include	He'd always had difficulty reading and his mother believes that Vincent

		Vincent's wife waiting at bottom.		
76	12.75	VLS high angle, Vincent at top of slide, wife at bottom, son climbing steps; slow zoom out to show whole environment, high-rise flats, etc; telephoto lens.	was suffering from dyslexia or word-blindness. Embarrassment about this problem may have been part of the cause for his truancy. Today, Vincent is back at classes again, working on his reading, trying to make up for lost time.'	
77	16.5	MCU Vincent's mother, pulling out to include Vincent; same scene as 71.	Mother: ' Well, like, he's gone back to school to learn to read and write properly, and from that he's progressed, and now he's doing an advanced maths course that he wouldn't have dreamed at one time that he could have had any kind of thoughts of doing it at all.'	
78	22.25	Scene in kitchen of Vincent's home; wife holding up naked baby; pan with her as she moves to give baby to Vincent; Vincent and baby.	Vincent voice over: ' I was older and more grown-up and more responsibilities. My wife already had the boy, and the girl we had a year later. I needed a better job at least. It's embarrassing when you can't spell things	
79	6.5	MS wife from near Vincent POV; pan down from her to Vincent sitting with baby.	when you've got to, got to fill in a form or something. And even if you claim on the dole you've	
80	9.25	CU wife; pan with her as she moves to take baby from Vincent; wife and baby.	got to fill in a form or something like that, and they ask you to spell your name or something and you can't do it.'	
81	36.25	MCU Vincent at his mother's home; same scene as 71.	Vincent: ' The school that I was in then is completely different from what I'm doing, the kind of school I'm in now. There's no strap or " sirs " or anything like that. You don't have to put your hand up if you want to go to the toilet or something, you just like now you call them by their	

Shot	Time	Description	Dialogue and commentary
			first names, like Bruce or Frank, and if you want to go anywhere you just walk out, and no one is going to ask you where you're going and things like that; it's just a completely different atmosphere.'
82	5.75	Tilt up Linda's body, as 45.	Commentary over: ' The second truant, Linda, used illness
83	6.25	CU Linda, as in 46.	as an excuse to skip school. She now lives 200 miles from Manchester, near Brighton.
84	9.5	Dissolve to CU Linda 1976.	When she left school, she started work as a dress-maker and then became a packer in a biscuit factory. At 16 she married David, himself a persistent truant, and now they have two young children.'
85	19	LS Linda pushing pram, child walking in front, outside her house; zoom in to hold front room window as Linda leaves frame and enters house.	Linda voice over: ' At first he was probably just as bad as me, you know; even worse, in fact, that when he went to school, well he just didn't go, and he left school before me, and because he couldn't get a job straight away, they blacked him out, my family anyway, so that made things worse.'
86	31.75	CU Linda, interior.	Interviewer off: ' So you were in a rough situation then? ' Linda: ' Well pretty bad. I wasn't working, naturally, and, well, David was only a junior then, so his wages were next to nothing and that's – we kind of started buying little bits of the home then, and then he got promotion, and with that, you know, he got a company place and, you know, we left Manchester then.
87	11.75	BCU Linda.	Now he's got his own shop

Shot	Time	Description	Dialogue and commentary

			at Loughton, and he did very well there, so that they automatically brought him like down here and now he's got his own store.'
88	4	MS Linda on sofa screen right, little girl beside her.	Interviewer off: 'Would you say you were a working-class person who's become middle-class?
89	13.25	CU Linda, as 86.	Linda: 'Less than working-class at first, I reckon. You could call us, like, just middle-class— improving.'
90	3.75	BCU daughter.	Interviewer off: 'What about your education, I mean you missed a lot of that
91	25.75	CU Linda; zoom in to BCU; sounds of baby off.	through your truancy. Do you regret that?' Linda: 'I do now. Like, I want, it holds you back on a lot of things; like when the children get old enough I wanted to start work again, and, well, what can you say, what job can you go for, I mean, just doing the same again, or I can either get, teach myself, you know
92	25.25	MS Linda, baby in feeding chair screen left.	Er, going to like night school, as well as home studies. Make up for lost time really, and then by the time the children are at school, you know, I hope to be able to go out, probably get a secretarial job or make up for, make up for what I missed.'
93	29.25	BCU Linda.	Interviewer off: 'What do you do at night?' Linda: 'Play chess a lot.' Interviewer off: 'You wouldn't have done that when you were 16.' Linda: 'No, I didn't know how to play chess when I was 16.' Interviewer off: 'What else do you do now, that

Shot   *Time*   *Description*   *Dialogue and Commentary*

Shot	Time	Description	Dialogue and Commentary
			you didn't do then? ' Linda: ' Well we play a lot of Scrabble as well, which gets your box working, using like different words and that.'
94	23	MS Linda and baby, as 92.	Interviewer off: ' If you had your time over and you were 16 now, would you go into class every day? ' Linda: ' Oh yes, definitely, yes. Well I've quite often discussed it, you know, with my husband and we're always saying likem you know, if we could only just go back to school and start again from senior school; like, you know, you don't realize what you've missed till you've missed it.'
95	8.25	CU Keith in bed, pulling out to MS as in 6.	Commentary over: ' At 15 the third truant, Keith, was an unmarried father, who spent much of his day in bed because he thought he had nothing more to learn.
96	2	Tin can shot as 51.	
97	4.25	VLS Keith and friend throwing stones as 52.	Of the three, Keith was the hardest truant to track down.
' 98	6.5	CU Keith in bed.	We eventually traced him to Australia, to a suburb of Brisbane. He only moved there two years ago.
99	5.75	Dissolve to CU Keith 1976, exterior, garden.	After officially leaving school, Keith went away from Manchester to start his first job with an electric company.'
100	44	CU-MCU Keith, in garden.	Keith: ' I kept the electric company one for about four months and then I left, and went to another one, and I started back there and kept that for about six months, and I worked on a mushroom farm, and

Shot	Time	Description	Dialogue and Commentary
			I worked in assembling swimming pools, and I went on the dole for a couple of weeks, and that was it, and then I moved back to Manchester." Australian interviewer off: 'How many jobs do you reckon you'd have had between now and then?' Keith: 'Now and then? About eight or nine, maybe more.' Australian interviewer off: 'Have you ever been out of work?' Keith: 'Yes, I've been out of work, months at a time, you know, about two months each time, between jobs; sometimes I have got a job, left it, and I've started the following week, you know.'
101	7.25	MCU Keith in garden getting in washing.	Commentary over: 'Keith now assembles car batteries and feels much better off in Australia.' Keith voice over: 'In England it takes more than one job,
102	·5	Close shot onto washing line, train seen passing in background.	unless you get a real good job. After that you've got to struggle to get through. Now
103	4	MCU Keith turning away from washing line, walks off screen left.	it's good, get paid good money, pay
104	7.75	LS Keith walking towards house screen left.	up my rent and still got about 80 dollars in my pocket, about £50. I pay more money here in tax than I ever
105	2.25	MS Keith going up steps of house.	did get in England in wages.'
106	38.5	CU Keith on steps; in to BCU at ' No, no.'	Aus interviewer off: 'Do you ever regret playing truant when you were at school?' Keith: 'No, no, I never missed anything. If I'd wanted to go for some

Dialogue and Commentary
special subject, I would
have gone, which I did do
anyway. I picked what days
I wanted to go in, but I
never missed anything.'
Aus interviewer off:
' You don't think you
were disadvantaged? '
Keith: ' No, not at all.'
Aus interviewer off:
' But wouldn't a better
education have given you
more money and a better
chance in life? '
Keith: ' Yes, it might have,
but I don't know because
I missed so much education
but I've still got a good
job, still got a good life,
well what I think's a good .
life anyway. So it doesn't
worry me, what I missed.'

107 29.25 MCU Keith, as 100;   Aus interviewer off:
             slow zoom in to BCU ' If you have children
             at ' I'll make   will you try to persuade
             them.'   them to go to school more
                                   regularly than you did? '
                                   Keith: ' I'll make them go
                                   till certain age when they
                                   can make up their own
                                   minds what they want to
                                   do. If they want to go,
                                   fair enough; if they want
                                   to leave, they'll leave; but
                                   they won't have as much
                                   time off as I had.'

      (8.25 freeze on last frame Commentary over: ' Today
             of Keith)   the three truants are very
                                   different from the rebellious
                                   and troubled adolescents
                                   of five years ago. Only
                                   Keith has no regrets for
                                   missing school.

108 11.75 Dissolve to LS   Vincent now has to find
             Vincent at top   time from his job and
             of slide, son going   family life to make up for
             to be picked up.   the lessons he ignored at
                                   school by attending adult
                                   education classes.

109 9.5   Dissolve to LS   Linda is studying at home
             Linda pushing pram   and going to night classes
             through shopping centre; so that she can get a good
             zoom in to MCS.   job when her children are
                                   old enough to go to school.

At the close of the previous section, the commentary had promised 'some surprises' (shot 59); this third section is there to provide them, to fulfil the expectations created by at last showing what has happened to the three truants, by completing the yesterday-today articulation. The organisation of the section answers, in an exact symmetrical balance, that of the second section: Vincent, Linda, and Keith are found now in the same order that they were found then and, as far as possible, in a similar mixture of scenes or images of their life and interviews. Each of the three parts of the section begins with a brief recall of the 1971 truant – for Vincent the mouse-shooting climax (shots 60-63 repeating 30-33), for Linda a moment from the boutique scene (shot 82 repeating 45), for Keith the stone throwing (shots 96-97 repeating 51-52) set between images of him in bed (shots 95 and 98) – and a dissolve then effects the transition from the old to the new face – Vincent (shots 63-64), Linda (shots 82-83), Keith (shots 98-99). The part devoted to Vincent follows very closely the corresponding part in the second section: with Vincent still living in the same city, it has been possible to set up the same interview situation with him and his mother, both of them occupying the same positions in frame and presented in the same constructions of editing and camera movement (thus, for example, the movement to concentrate on the mother in shot 36 is rhymingly repeated and inverted in shot 77 with the movement off the concentration on the mother, counter-pointing the very different sentiments being voiced in the two cases). The part dealing with Linda begins with a relatively lengthy single shot scene (85) establishing her domestic status and class situation (note the way in which the front room window is picked out and held at the end of the shot: at once a transition, the next shot will be in that room inside the house, and a stress, Linda's life and happiness is inside in the stability of the home). As for the part concerning Keith, it was clearly shot to order by an Australian company and furnishes the required interview together with a clumsy 'life today' sequence of Keith getting in washing and walking in the garden.

The scenes here interlock the need for images, the demands of the programme's organisation and its idea, and the operation of the specific ideological content that will be rendered explicit by the Chief Education Officer in the Epilogue. In the interests of this last, 'life today' means 'domestic life', the latter essential to the truancy/settling down model of interpretation that is proposed over the yesterday-today articulation ('settling down' is the formula rightly derived from the 1976 film by the Education Officer in shot 110). Most readily available with Linda as mother and housewife, domestic life is fairly easily manageable with Vincent via the insertion of the kitchen-with-baby scene (no attempt, for instance, to film the kind of school Vincent con-

trasts with his old school) and only very difficultly with Keith (a few half-hearted shots of his washing) who must therefore be prompted into a future domesticity by questions as to his children to come (note that the realisation of the signified 'settling down " as a prime concern is the end of any recollection of a previous key emphasis on Keith as ' unmarried father ').

To say that the truancy/settling-down model of interpretation is proposed *over* the yesterday-today articulation is to emphasise that the latter continues to be fundamental, to have its controlling existence as the programme's very idea and focus of interest. The crystallising figure of the section is the dissolve from past to present which opens each of the Vincent, Linda, Keith parts (the stills for Linda are given here − 17-19 − as example): the spectacular here and now of memory as the face is found again yesterday and refound today − memory present before you. The effect, the visible condensation and juxtaposition, is specific to television: not that ' it cannot be done ' in cinema (after all, the images used here were originally obtained on film); simply, a part of its force depends on the impression of *actuality* television can exploit. That impression will be a later point for discussion. At this stage, it is necessary only to note in addition the implication of the idea of the programme, the yesterday-today articulation, in the novelistic. Interest and attention are directed to the truants as *lives*, to a pattern of fate − what has become of them? − brilliantly figured in the dissolves. The truants are accorded their sole reality in that television fate: television a new production of the novelistic, a new time: the novel created before your eyes, in the home, an actualisation of destiny.

The construction of the Linda interview sequence poses particularly clearly certain problems which have great importance for the understanding, analysis, and criticism of uses of television. Shots 86-94 are assembled by the editing as a single interview scene: there are no evident breaks and the questions asked by a voice-off in the direction in which Linda is facing, prompt answers which follow smoothly from shot to shot. In fact, however, that unity is a fiction, precisely a construction of the editing. Linda was interviewed not at one time but at two different times, as evidenced (for an analysis able to break the flow of the programme) by the appearance and disappearance of the baby on sound or image tracks: shots 86-90 are (apparently) from one interview time but shot 91 is from a second interview time (though no indication is given of this) which continues in shot 92; shot 93 returns to the first interview time and shot 94 in its turn to the second (again with no indications given in either case). In other words, the Linda interview scene is assembled from bits of two scenes cut together. That formulation, however, is itself naive, since neither of the

two scenes posited ever existed as such. At different times during 45
a morning or afternoon Linda was asked questions and filmed
answering them with a number of intervening changes in camera
set up; thus, for example, within the ' first interview time ', shots
86 and 87 may look temporally continuous but that continuity is
made solely by the editing, is an illusion. Not unexpectedly, tele-
vision does, of course, have a category of shot that is the very
expression of its commitment to such illusion – the cutaway. Shot
88 is a simple example: the synch-sound film of Linda speaking to
camera can be broken (and so edited, altered, rearranged, speeded
up by deletions . . .) by inserting a silent shot (from a stock of
such shots taken at the end of the interview) over which the
interviewer's question can be re-recorded (or, possibly at least,

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any other question one decides one now wants recorded); shot 88
moves us with no problem over a break between shots 87 and 89,
moves us nicely, indeed, insofar as it contributes to the general
picture of Linda in her home – insofar as it follows the rules:
' cutaways should serve a purpose beyond merely covering up an
awkward cut; they must earn their place by contributing to the
total effect '; ' the more such cutaways are related to the main
action, the less noticeable the " cheat " will be '.[21]

The programme shows itself letting the truants speak, as they

21. Tyrrell: op cit, pp 63, 74.

were in 1971, as they are in 1976. What the preceding discussion of the Linda interview underlines is that people never have their own time, they have television time (a time of which the cutaway is an element). Hence an important part of Godard's recent work in television was the attempt to refuse that time. Hence the reaction of the institution in a magazine like *Télé 7 jours* (roughly equivalent to the *TV Times*): ' The camera purrs on, motionless, and Godard lets people talk, forcing them to come to terms with their own weaknesses. It's dreary enough and very long. No doubt it's left to the viewer to draw conclusions. Will they? We don't think so. But at least they'll be convinced that this programme, boring for everyone, didn't cost very much.'[22]

No one is filmed talking straight into camera in *Yesterday's Truants*. That form of ' direct address ' is generally reserved for the representatives of television (announcers, presenters, narrators, etc.), present in *World in Action* programmes only as the off-screen voice of question or commentary. The truants look slightly away from us, their look and words directed off-camera towards the off-screen voice, the source of the questions, the absent interlocutor (doubly absent, since there is no guarantee that the voice and question heard in the programme are the voice and question to which the truant is shown responding – precisely one of the advantages of the régime of the cutaway); whatever the scale of shot (from medium shot to big close-up in these interview scenes), the framing is always such as to produce the angle – in a range between approximately 10 and 30 degrees – of a look-off off-centre.

The crux here is a system of address that is a veritable ideology of *profile*. It is not that in any way we will hear the truants speaking through television to us for themselves, it is that we will *see* the truants talking. The position assigned is that of the *look on* (we look on), hence of the *over-look* (looking on, we have a certain domination, an overall perspective, we look over), hence of the *real look* (looking on, looking over, we have the final look, the position on the whole scene, on what is really the case). The system of address in question works, that is, for the fiction of a position outside of any system, the construction of the position of the look on as unimplicated in address. Thus the strategies of the oblique, the off-centre angles which preserve the autonomy of a space to be seen and of the look that sees it; the angles which are a visible derivation from the ideology of profile, from the proposition of the bias of reality itself as the vision and source of address of the programme – the world seen in action, its scenes.

What is the function of shot 76 with its use of telephoto lens to pull out to an extreme general view of the playground surround-

22. *Télé 7 jours*, 25 July, 1976, p 20.

ings (stills 20 and 21)? Visual interest and sheer desire to exploit technical possibilities? No doubt. But also an impetus to social comment. Without any equivalent in the programme (unless perhaps the very peculiar shot 102 with a train and a landscape glimpsed in the background past Keith's washing), this shot stands as a brief trace of an analysis that never took place, a kind of moment of guilty conscience almost. The limits of the missed analysis are very clear: those of a milieu sociology; the shot functions to show the environment – this is television Taine.
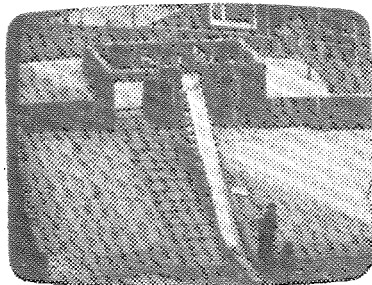
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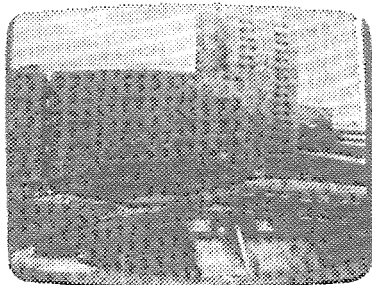
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Section IV – Epilogue (3 minutes, 58 seconds) & Coda (19 seconds)

Shot	Time	Description	Dialogue and commentary
110	101	MCU Dudley Fiske, Manchester Chief Education Officer; office interior: zoom in to BCU at discussion of dyslexia.	Commentary over continues from 109: Dudley Fiske has been Manchester's Chief Education Officer for the past eight years. He knew of the three truants in 1971 and we showed him our film of them as they are now. Dudley Fiske: ' My overall impression, I think, was that I was encouraged to find out how they were now doing. One has to say that if one had talked to them only two or three years after they left school it would appear from what they've said that they were all having difficulties with work and difficulties in settling down. To be specific, if the diagnosis for Vincent is that he had dyslexia and that he is now getting over that through some remedial classes or evening classes, then I think one has to say that, at some point, it would

Shot Time   *Description*

Shot	Time	Description	Dialogue and commentary
			seem that the educational system, by not diagnosing that, failed him earlier on, and if he could have learned to read and write earlier in a successful way his attendance might have been more satisfactory. But all three specifically seem to some extent to regret the extent to which they were away from school, and even Keith in Australia – who seems to me to be blossoming in that country – does say that his children will not be allowed to stay away as much as he stayed away.' Interviewer off: ' Does the level of adjustment today, does that surprise you or is it what you would have expected? ' Fiske: ' It surprised me to some extent, because having been involved a little in the earlier programme, I've wondered from time to time how they had faired. It encourages me as someone responsible for an educational system as a whole, because one of the principles on which we have been working is to try to make sure there is a second chance for those who don't take full advantage of schooling.'
111	8.75	CU profile Dudley Fiske.	Interviewer off: ' Obviously truancy is worrying for parents and teachers at the time it is happening, but what we've seen might suggest that it may not be so important in the long run.'
112	34	MCU Dudley Fiske; zoom in to BCU at ' What do you think.'	Fiske: ' I think it is worrying for teachers. I would agree with that. What concerns us is that it sometimes doesn't seem to worry parents enough. Parents seem increasingly to be prepared to agree to

Shot	Time	Description	Dialogue and commentary
			their children not attending school regularly and not to do much about it.' Interviewer off: 'What do you think they could do about it? ' Fiske: 'Well I think it comes out in one of the interviews with one of these three made in 1971 that the parents were aware that there was more they could do, but seemed to have given up the attempt to make the child see the value of education.'
113	64	MCU Dudley Fiske; zoom in the BCU at ' giving them more relevant.'	Interviewer off: 'Is there anything the schools could be doing for children like these that would help them learn more while they're in the school years, so that they don't have to start learning when they are about twenty? ' Fiske: 'I think it would be wrong for anyone in education, including the teachers, to believe that the persistent absence of a number of children is not a reflection of what the schools offer. The main suggestion is that the schools might offer a curriculum that's more relevant, and in the terms of the young people who stay away, and of some of their parents, what they mean by relevance is giving them more relevant training for particular jobs.' Interviewer off: 'And you think that would help with truancy? ' Fiske: 'Well there are those who believe it would help, though the view in the education system has always been to seek a broad education and not to make our secondary education vocational.' Interviewer off: 'And what is your view? ' Fiske: 'My view is that

Shot   *Time*   *Description*   *Dialogue and Commentary*

Shot	Time	Description	Dialogue and Commentary
			the critics now who are looking for rather more relevance in the curriculum of the older secondary school pupil probably have some substance.'
114	3.75	MS/MCS Dudley Fiske, revealing office surroundings.	Interviewer off: 'What are the risks that children take through becoming regular
115	26.5	BCU Dudley Fiske.	truants? ' Fiske: ' Well, the main risk is in terms of their own future, and the extent to which the prospective employer will be prepared to look at them on the basis of their school record and on what the school will say about them. This is a bit ironic for them, because some of them give as their main reason for being truants that they're bored with school and would prefer to work; but in fact they put themselves at hasard in the employment market, and today that is very important for them.'
116	3.75	As 1: coming to school.	
117	1.50	As beginning 29: Vincent aiming.	
118	2	As end 29: rifle barrel.	
119	1.50	As end 16: coming into school.	
120	1.75	As end 39: Linda past gravestones.	
121	3.75	As beginning 40: Linda in boutique.	
122	1.75	Similar to 14, 15; new shot children in school.	
123	1.75	As 6: Keith in bed.	
124	1.25	As 119, new continuation.	

The idea of the programme, yesterday-today, is essentially played out over sections II and III, but the development of that idea is sanctioned by the simultaneous claim to a concern with the serious social problem of truancy. Hence the Epilogue, the word at the end, the word *on* the programme; literally so, since Dudley Fiske is effectively asked to comment on the earlier sections (' we showed him our film of them as they are now ' shot 110), to add the official voice, the voice of responsibility. As that voice, of course, his presentation is very different to that of the truants; note simply in this respect the duration of the shots in which he talks: Vincent, Linda, and Keith get television time, the Manchester Chief Education Officer gets near to his own time of speech.

There is no need to analyse at length the terms of the official voice and its presentation. What is much more important here is to see how the idea of the programme can still dominate in this section and how that domination can emerge as the definition of a second role for Dudley Fiske.

Asked to comment on the programme, to draw authoritative conclusions for the viewer, Dudley Fiske is also asked to watch the programme, to be the viewer; in both senses, he is placed as the viewer's *point of view* on the programme. To put it another way, he participates in the topic (the problem of truancy) *and* in the idea (yesterday-today), is authority for and representative of the viewer. The representative fascination with the idea is con-stantly apparent in what he says (' I've wondered from time to time how they had fared ' shot 110) and does (various movements in shot 110 which appear to mime a relation to some monitor or screen off on which he had been able to watch ' our film of them as they are now '), as in little complexes of voice, expression, and gesture difficult to set down in words (for example, the smiling aside and gesture off in shot 110 concerning Keith in Australia ' who seems to me to be blossoming in that country ', the authority-Fiske visibly giving way to the viewer-Fiske.

The dynamics of this are easy to grasp. The programme pro-duces at its close a figure who is at once view and viewer. In so doing, it brings together and resolves neatly in a single term the elements of its constant movement, that play between topic and idea and the definition of the former for and from the latter.

The use of the word ' blossoming ' in the reference to Keith ' who seems to me to be blossoming in that country ' mentioned above raises a difficult question that can be no more than indicated in this present discussion. Dudley Fiske finds the word from the film he has been shown, film in which Keith is seen at various points framed in close-up against a background of exuberant foliage; the word responds to the visual image, producing the verbal image it invites. Since Fiske is commenting on the film

52 material, it is not surprising to find similar examples in the voice-over commentary itself, as in shot 25 where the phrase 'aimless routine' is spoken over an image of Vincent aiming a rifle or in shot 97 where 'track down' comes with a shot of Keith throwing stones at a tin can in the middle of railway tracks. These examples are merely those that stand out and are thus noticed. Moreover, the formulations of them just given beg the difficult question, which is that of the relations between visual images and structures of linguistic understanding and, beyond that, of the ideological operation of – and on – those relations in a programme such as *Yesterday's Truants*. In short, analysis ought to be able to focus a level of metaphor tying between image and language and to understand the holding of meanings and positions in those ties.

Shots 110, 112, and 113 all contain the same zoom-in movement from medium close-up to big close-up. This reiterated movement is a veritable tic of 'visual interest'; without any particular reason in the shots, it comes nevertheless and inevitably from the constraint to do something, to make 'good television', where the latter means motion and action and drama, the pace and rhythm of the programme.

The pace and rhythm of the programme are returned absolutely by the Coda. Topic and idea are balanced out with the figure of Dudley Fiske, but the programme finally concludes with a montage that runs over something of the essence of that determining idea: the three truants as they were again, Vincent, Linda, and Keith in the habitual order of the programme (no recall of Dudley Fiske, himself only a viewer of this real programme) and with one or two highlight shots (the rifle barrel, the fancy cut from graveyard to boutique). A brief memory of essence, a sudden memento at the end, the Coda remembers images, nothing of the spoken word; its sound accompaniment is the *World in Action* theme music but its demonstration – the demonstration of the whole programme – is that of television in action, of that world.

CONCLUSION

Explicitly or implicitly, time has been an important point of concern on a number of occasions in the course of the preceding analysis. That concern must now be developed systematically in order to allow understanding of one or two more general problems.

There is a simple and obvious way of comparing novel, film, and television programme as specific sets of temporal junction or disjunction; the following scheme is fairly typical in this respect:[23]

23. M Tardy: 'Cinéma et télévision', *Cahiers pédagogiques*, September 1967, p 71.

Novel: time of literary creation $\neq$ time of reading $\neq$ diegetic
time
Film: time of cinematic creation $\neq$ projection-viewing time $\neq$
diegetic time
TV programme: time of television creation $=$ transmission-viewing
time $=$ diegetic time (time of event)
[$=$ indicates equivalence, $\neq$ indicates non-equivalence]

What is of interest here is not the inadequacy of such a scheme (against which it is easy to raise objections; a film, for instance, can perfectly well operate an equivalence between diegetic time and viewing time – witness, to go no further, the first Lumière films) but its adequacy to normal assumptions (so that film will be characterised precisely by reference to the practice of classic narrative cinema). Within the terms of those assumptions, *the television programme is then effectively identified with the ' live ' television programme*. Television covers at least the transmission of cinema films, the transmission of video tape-recorded material, the transmission of film shot for television (*Yesterday's Truants* consisting entirely of such film[24]), and transmission ' live ', ' as it happens ', unrecorded, *en direct* (the French expression). The last is very far indeed from representing the bulk of the television seen but is nevertheless taken automatically as the television norm, as the very definition of television. Leaving aside the sleight of hand involved in the conception of a ' live broadcast ' (never some Reality direct, always the television image of a televised reality), it is the context and the various implications of that definition which need to be considered.

In one sense, the television image itself *is* effectively ' live ', very different in this to that of film. Where the latter depends on the immobility of the frame, the former, electronic and not photographic, is an image in perpetual motion, the movement of a continually scanning beam; whatever the status of the material transmitted, the image as series of electric impulses is necessarily ' as it happens '. Hence the possibility of *performing* the television image – electronic, it can be modified, altered, transformed in the moment of its transmission, is a production in the present. That present, moreover, is also the particular presence of the image, given in a kind of movement towards the spectator, very different again to the projected image on the cinema screen: the cinema

24. ' Most current affairs documentaries have so far been made as films. There have been exceptions to this, of course, and the original pattern of " studio-interview-plus-film-inserts " crops up from time to time. But film remains the more normal method, and for the programme which is prepared quickly it must be film that is shot with equipment as mobile and as sturdy as that used for news. A series like *World in Action* needs to get its cameras into situations where lightness and portability are essential to success . . .' Swallow: op cit, p 97.

screen film image is distant, inaccessible, fascinatingly fixed (all the references to fetishism in film criticism and theory); the television image is close (the television screen occupying a much reduced part of the spectator's visual field), available (the TV set a controllable possession), interpellative (not by chance that it includes unexceptionally straight address from the screen, broadcasters who 'talk to the public '). ^

These notations do no more than adduce one or two elements which contribute to the constantly acknowledged and valued effect of the ' *immediacy* ' of television: ' the combination of immediacy, intimacy and mass communication is what gives television . . . its tremendous power '.[25] The immediate time of the image is pulled into a confusion with the time of the events shown, tending to diminish the impression of the mode of presence in absence characteristic of film,[26] suggesting a permanently alive view on the world; the generalised fantasy of the television institution of the image is exactly that it is *direct,* and direct *for me.*

The immediacy effect is supported by the experience of flow: like the world, television never stops, is continuous. Programmes, however, organise times within that flow; within the context of the overall definition of television as ' live ' and on the maintained basis of ' immediacy '.

A single programme. *Yesterday's Truants* is a complex of differing and heterogeneous times; Figure II is a representation of this. A number of widely diverging temporal relations are brought together on the ground of the present of the image: from the duration-time for the transmission of the programme to the times of the various fragments joined into scenes for the diegesis (thus the Linda part of the yesterday section joins 1 cemetery, 2 boutique, and 3 home interview fragments, with 2 itself joining fragments from four different shooting times, and so on – Figure II can provide only summary indications). The sound-track alone is made up of a multiplicity of times; hence its separate specification in the Figure, though its elements have their functions in the discourse and the diegesis.

What is important here is less the detail of these times than the recognition of the heterogeneity that the programme contains, that it brings into order – the order of television time, the constant passage of the image, the ' present continuous '. At one point in Queneau's novel *Les Fleurs bleues,* a character jubilates: ' Straightaway! Absolutely immediately! The telly is actuality congealed into history. No sooner said than done.'[27] That formulation , can be reversed: history as actuality; where film sides towards

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25. Tyrrell: op cit, p 9.
26. cf C Metz: ' The imaginary signifier ', *Screen* v 16 n 2, Summer 1976, pp 46-48.
27. R Queneau: *Les Fleurs bleues,* Paris 1965, p 60.

Figure II

Television time — present continuous of the image

Transmission time	Programme time	Discursive production times	Sound times	Diegetic/referential times		
25' 50"	time in flow – 'slot'	organising rhythms, rhymes, balances, repetitions, parallelisms, through the programme; composition into, within and across 'scenes' through programme; etc.	commentary over		V	1, 2 ⎱ 1,2,3,4
	time in series – 'periodicity'		synch sound	yesterday/ 1971	L	1,2,3 ⎱
			Vincent, Linda, Keith, voices over		K	1,2,3 ⎱ 1,2
			Interviewers' questions off/over	today/ 1976	V	1,2,3
			music (boutique, W in A)		L	1,2 ⎱ 1,2
				unmarked, neutral description – 'passages'	K	1
				Dudley Fiske on 1971/1976 articulation; on programme		

56 instantaneous memory ('everything is absent, everything is *recorded* – as a memory trace which is so at once, without having been something else before '[28]), television operates much more as an absence of memory, the recorded material it uses – including the material recorded on film – instituted as actual in the production of the television image. This is not, of course, to suggest that the television transmission of, say, *High Sierra* will induce the illusion of watching a live performance by Bogart and Lupino; simply, it is to emphasise the way in which what is specific to television – the possibility of 'live broadcasting', the present electronic production of the image – becomes the term of its exploited imaginary, the generalised fantasy already mentioned; which fantasy – the very title *World in Action* pays tribute to its power – is then taken for the ground reality of television and its programmes, exactly the normal assumption.

ΓDirect, and direct for me. Television is the institution of an *occupation*: it occupies the viewer as subject in a permanent arena of 'communicationality'¬ (the word is rebarbative but necessary *to indicate the establishment of a horizon of indefinitely possible intelligibility: the image is there in order . . .).*ΓLittle matter in this respect what is communicated, the crux is the creation and maintenance of the communicating situation and the realisation of the viewer as subject in that situation.ΓThe subject of television is a citizen in a world of communication; he or she is called – and occupied – there, for that world.' Immediacy, intimacy, and mass communication': television here and now, for me personally, for me as the unity of everyone. When Williams writes that 'whatever the social and cultural reasons may finally be, it is clear that watching dramatic simulation of a wide range of experiences is an essential part of our modern cultural pattern ',[29] it should be added that, before the fact of drama or of any other particular form, watching television in itself is a requirement of socialisation exactly insofar as it represents the proposition of the intelligible, the conception of the limits of the communicating. The role of the image is to be present, available for you, for me, in those terms: the constant passage, the screen filled, unbroken. The message – the specific ideological position – is elsewhere: in the spoken word of a commentary, for example, or the declarations of a Dudley Fiske in their place in a programme; what counts initially – institutionally – is the situation, the communicationality (the real context for understanding that 'TV companies can perhaps tolerate much more in terms of content than they can in formal innovation '[30]).

28. Metz: art cit, p 47.
29. Williams: op cit, p 59.
30. E Buscombe: '*The Sweeney* – better than nothing? ', *Screen Education* 20, Autumn 1976, p 67n.

Commentary, moreover, is a clear example of the respect paid
to and the use made of that initial situation. 'Film has its own
pace and logic, sometimes faster than words, sometimes slower,
and the commentary must follow it. Cutting film to match words
is possible, but it never works for long. The picture is naturally
dominant.'[31] The empirical rule of the dominance of the picture
is a rationalisation of the ideology of the document, the window
on the world; the image *must be* the cause, the initiator; the
commentary follows the images which are given as its actuality
(remember the discussion above of the ' in school ' passage in the
first section of *Yesterday's Truants*). Commentary, that is, is
formalised as addition and not as determination or contradiction.
Hence its discretion – the image *first* – which is at the same time
its claim to a power of truth – commentary as the *end* of the
image, the afterword. The truants speak in synch or in an identifi-
able voice-over; commentary and questions, by contrast, come from
nowhere in the programme, are themselves *unquestionable,* merely
a position – and for the viewer – on the image.

The institution of the television time of occupation just described
is a first level at which the question of television and ideology
would need to be posed. What is missing so often in analyses of
television programmes is any reference to the fact of television
itself and to the ideological operations developed in that fact;
there is a *generality* of ideology in the institution, ' before ' the
production of a particular ideological position. Which is why critical
accounts of television that begin from the demonstration of
particular positions drift very easily into false arguments over
point of view. To show the workings of bias is valuable – for
example, in the sensitive area of news – but can be to remain
ultimately within a system to which television is fully adapted, that
of *viewpoint*: the acknowledgement of points of view – partialities –
the expression of the plurality of which represents objective truth –
impartiality. As viewpoint, this or that individual's, many things
may be said; the world, after all, is complex, ' multi-coloured ',
and television's point of view is that of the world, of complexity;
the difference you produce will be incorporated in the long run as
another hue in the spectrum, part of the occupation, a moment
in the pulsating continuum. What is intolerable – perhaps im-
possible in the present context – is to displace the terms of the
institution, to break from point of view, for instance, into analysis
and contradiction, to separate from the unity of ' communication '
(the problem of the – symptomatically mis-named – *Viewpoint*
series).

In the account of *Yesterday's Truants* given here no attempt has

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31. Tyrrell: op cit, p 34.

been made to consider the programme's stance with regard to truancy and the education system, to argue with Dudley Fiske, or whatever; television and not the particular position has been the focus. That focus, however, has included a constant attention to the idea of the programme, the nature of its interest in and its development of the topic of truancy: between the ideological generality of the institution and the specific ideology of education, there is another level which needs to be grasped in its functioning and effects. When Williams talks of watching ' dramatic simulation of a wide range of experiences ', moreover, he comes near to characterising this other level: in its claim as document (real people, real situations), *Yesterday's Truants* is offered as without any such simulation (though in the actual shooting, of course, the people were evidently made to simulate: Vincent asked to ' be shooting mice ' or Linda to go out and ' be coming home with the children '); its organisation is nevertheless dramatic through and through, or, more accurately, *novelistic.*

Unlike cinema where the films produced for normal commercial distribution are essentially limited to a single mode, the fiction feature-film, television knows a wide variety, incorporating those modes which remain marginal in commercial cinema (the docu- mentary, for example). Yet this variety must not be allowed to hide a fundamental continuity: like cinema, television is an apparatus used for the production-reproduction of the novelistic; it serves to address the problem of the definition of forms of individual mean- ing within the limits of existing social representations and their determining social relations, the provision and maintenance of terms of social intelligibility for the individual. At one level tele- vision initiates the permanent arena of communicationality, at a further level it proposes to communicate this or that in this or that programme (a programme *about* truancy); between the two, as the juncture of their realisation, it maps out fictions, little dramas of making sense in which the viewer as subject is carried along − in which, indeed, the individual becomes ' the viewer ', the point of view of the sense of the programme. Summoned as citizen into a world of communication to receive particular communica- tions, the individual must be held into the programme, *entertained* as well as occupied. Hence the organising movement of *Yesterday's Truants* with its scenes, its rhymes, its multiple times, varied yet narrated into coherence through the basic idea, the fascination with identity, with the *lives* of the truants. The novelistic is a veritable process of identification in a quite simple sense of finding, review- ing, staging, voicing *identifying* in terms of lives, multiple times fused in that basic vision which supports the whole viewpoint definition: viewpoints, people, the world seen sympathetically − the novel, initial apparatus for the novelistic, knows its major development in the nineteenth century as a vehicle of sympathy − as it happens, seen for you and I, as you and I, the fictions of this

Analysing *Yesterday's Truants*, the present essay has been concerned to demonstrate television in action. What is the status here of ' television ', in particular the conception of determination involved? Williams stresses that ' unlike all previous communications technologies, radio and television were *systems primarily developed for transmission and reception as abstract processes, with little definition of preceding content* '.[32] At the same time, the process of development itself is that ' through which, in particular economic situations, a set of scattered technical devices became an applied technology and then a social technology '.[33] Our demonstration has been precisely that of *a social technology in its effects of construction and meaning*; an emphasis which is that neither of a technological determinism nor that of a simply determined technology. The action is the action of a relation of the technological and the social as *television*, the institution, a specific history. In this context, the ' little definition of preceding content ' is misleading: institution, television was given for the production-reproduction of the novelistic, relay of novel, photograph, and film, extended variation (' variety ') on the renewal of the same function − the mapping of the ' individual social ', the provision of present subject fictions in the image of the ideological action of the world.

' So we said: let's do as television does, but a little differently.'[34] The point is not to provide but to change television; at least, within the constraining relation of the institution, to do a little differently. Easier to say than to accomplish: ' there is no time to ask ourselves whether there may not be other ways in which the material could be presented − potentialities to be revealed which our work-routines inhibit us from seeing ',[35] one version of the difficulty from the producer ' in television ' (as is the statement itself, symptomatically locked in television's terms). No doubt it is necessary to be pessimistic. Our contribution in this account has been towards the organisation of pessimism, trying to grasp it in analysis, to suggest briefly, sketchily, constant moments of problem, constant points from which work should begin. If nothing else, but then this was all our strategy in such an initial piece, merely to *expose* television in its programmes − stopped and laid out on the page − has a value against the sufficiency of the institution and its unquestioned performance of the subject.

32. Williams: op cit, p 25.
33. Ibid, p 24.
34. J-L Godard, cit in L Marcorelles: ' Le voyage en France de Jean-Luc Godard ', *Le Monde*, 18-19 July, 1976.
35. Vaughan: op cit, p 19.

SCREEN EDUCATION

Number 20, Autumn 1976
Special Number on the TV crime series *The Sweeney*, with articles by Cary Bazalgette, Edward Buscombe, John Dennington, Richard Patterson, John Tulloch, Phillip Drummond and Geoff Hurd.

Number 21, Winter 1976/77
Special Number on Practical Work, with articles by Terry Dennett and Jo Spence on Photography, Ideology and Education; Hugh Morris, Chris Mottershead, Bob Ferguson and Roger Stephens on practical work in TV and media studies; Richard Eke on film in the primary school.

Number 22, Spring 1977
Special Number on Popular Culture and Education, with articles by Manuel Alvarado, Richard Collins, Bob Ferguson, Jim Grealy, Fred Hunter, Colin McArthur, Geoffrey Nowell-Smith, Colin Sparks, Roy Stafford.

For subscriptions and prices, see page 2

EVENTS

Weekend and Day Schools   For reasons beyond our control the weekend school of Television and the State, scheduled for June, has had to be postponed. We apologise for any inconvenience this may have caused. Provisional topics for schools to be held in 1977–78 are: *Weekends* – Television and the State after Annan; Independent/Avant-Garde Cinema; Documentary Film: *Day Schools* – Textual Analysis; Ideology; Teaching Practice.

Screen Readers' Meeting   The meeting for this issue will take place in the autumn, and will be concerned with television.

For further details write to:
Society for Education in Film and Television
29 Old Compton Street
London W1V 5PL

Script

1   Opening pages
[1′ 05″]* *Turning over the pages of* Midi-Minuit Fantastique,
beginning with a heading ' Le Mythe de la femme ' *and stopping at
a photo-montage of Greta Garbo as the Sphinx. ECU. Meanwhile
titles in superimposition:*

Riddles of the Sphinx

A narrative of what wishes what it wishes it to be – Gertrude
Stein[1]

1 Opening pages
2 Laura speaking
3 Stones
4 Louise's story told in thirteen shots
5 Acrobats
6 Laura listening
7 Puzzle ending

Figure 1

2   Laura speaking
[05″] *Title: Figure* 2
[3′ 31″] *Speech introducing the Sphinx as Voice Off, delivered
to camera by Laura Mulvey, intercut with images of the Sphinx.
The sequence opens with a shot of a Greek vase; then there is a
very brief shot of Laura seated in front of a table on which there
are a microphone, two books, a child's mug and a pencil sharpener
in the form of a small globe; then there is a shot of another vase
and a return to the set-up of Laura speaking. The alternation
continues with, successively: detail from Gustave Moreau's
' Oedipus and the Sphinx '/Laura/Garbo as Sphinx/Laura/profile
shot of the Egyptian Sphinx/Laura/full face shot of the Sphinx/
Laura/zoom-in onto the mouth of the Sphinx/Laura again. The
shots of Laura become longer as the sequence proceeds.*

LAURA: When we were planning the central section of this film,
about a mother and child, we decided to use the voice of the

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* Shot timings are in minutes and seconds throughout.
1. G Stein: ' Regular regularly in narrative ' in *How to Write.*

Sphinx as an imaginary narrator – because the Sphinx repre-
sents, not the voice of truth, not an answering voice, but its
opposite: a questioning voice, a voice asking a riddle. The
Oedipus myth associates the voice of the Sphinx with mother-
hood as mystery and with resistance to patriarchy.

In some ways the Sphinx is the forgotten character in the
story of Oedipus. Everybody knows that Oedipus killed his
father and married his mother, but the part played by the
Sphinx is often overlooked. Oedipus set off for Thebes, turning
away from Corinth, where he'd been brought up by foster
parents. The Sphinx sat perched on a cliff or pillar outside the
city gates; she asked every man who went past a riddle. If
they couldn't answer she devoured them. Then she stopped
Oedipus when he went past and when he answered her
correctly, she threw herself down from the pillar and killed
herself.

The myth of the Sphinx took on new life after Napoleon's
campaigns in Egypt, when the Great Sphinx at Gizeh was
disclosed once again to Western eyes. The Egyptian Sphinx
is male, but on its blank face, resonant with mystery and
with death, the spectator could project the image of the Greek
Sphinx. Once again the Sphinx could enter popular mythology,
in the image of male fears and male fantasies, the cannibalistic
mother, part bestial, part angelic, indecipherable.

Oedipus is different from other Greek heroes in that he
defeated the monster, not by strength or by bravery, but
simply by intelligence. In his answer to the riddle, Oedipus
restored the generations to their proper order, but by doing
so he fell into a further trap. In his own life he disordered
them once more by marrying his own mother. It's almost as
if Oedipus stands for the conscious mind and the Sphinx for
the unconscious. The riddle confuses and disorders logical
categories and the monster is a hybrid of human, animal and
bird. But reading between the lines the myth confirms women's
sense of exclusion and suppression. The Sphinx is outside the
city gates, she challenges the culture of the city, with its
order of kinship and its order of knowledge, a culture and a
political system which assign women a subordinate place.

To the patriarchy, the Sphinx as woman is a threat and a
riddle, but women within patriarchy are faced with a never-
ending series of threats and riddles – dilemmas which are hard
for women to solve, because the culture within which they
must think is not theirs. We live in a society ruled by the
father, in which the place of the mother is suppressed.
Motherhood and how to live it, or not to live it, lies at the
roots of the dilemma. And meanwhile the Sphinx can only
speak with a voice apart, a voice off.

[05"] *Title: Figure 3*

[7' 14"] *Montage sequence of found footage of the Egyptian Sphinx, refilmed through a number of generations with the aid of a motion-analyser projector, using zooms, step motion, slow and reverse motion, freeze frames, and extreme close-up (concentrating on the Sphinx's mouth) eventually showing film grain.*
Music.

4   Louise's story told in thirteen shots
(Each shot is a 360° pan. Music, voice off and synch dialogue as specified. Intertitles.)

[05"] *Title: Figure 4*

(1)
[12"] *Intertitle:* Perhaps Louise is too close to her child. How much longer can she reject the outside world, other people, other demands. Her husband often

[6' 09"] *Louise's kitchen. Louise prepares scrambled egg for her two-year-old daughter, Anna. The shot ends when her husband, Chris, comes home. Tight framing at work-surface height.*
Music, VO.

> VOICE OFF:
> Time to get ready. Time to come in.
> Things to forget. Things to lose.
> Meal time. Story time.
>
> Desultory. Peremptory.
> Keeping going. Keeping looking.
> Reading like a book. Relief.
> Things to cook.
>
> Keeping in the background.
> Fish-slice. Domestic labour.
>
> Disheartened. Burdened.
> Keeping calm. Keeping clean.
> Fitting like a glove. Remorse.
> Things to mend.
>
> Losing touch with reality.
> Dish-cloth. Narcissistic love.
>
> Idolise. Tranquillise.
> Losing count. Losing control.
> Shaking like a leaf. Release.
> Things to say.

No time to make amends. No time for tea.
Time to worry. No time to hold.
Things to hold. Things past.
Meal time. Story time.   ,

Keeping going. Keeping looking.
Reading like a book.
Things to forget. Things to lose.
No time lost.
Story time.

(2)
[12"] *Intertitle:* bedtime, she likes to stay in Anna's room, waiting
for her to fall asleep and tidying away the traces of the day. She
still seems to need

[3′ 42"] *Anna's bedroom. Louise tidies up while Anna goes to
sleep in her cot. Tight framing at cot height.
Music, VO.*

VOICE OFF:
Distressed. Strained.

Nesting. In the nest. Comfort. Effort.
At the breast. At rest.
Resting.

Take leave. Take moss. Be close.
Be clasped and cleft. Be close.

Nesting. Acquiesced. Memory. Mystery.
Dispossessed. Depressed.
Trusting.

Make cross. Make grieve. Morose.
Subject to conquest. Object to incest.

Nesting. From the nest. Blood. Brood.
From the breast. Caressed.
Hurting.

Bleeding. It was obvious.
It was as obvious as it was oblivious.
Brooding. It was plain. Be close.
It was as plain as it was pain.

Make love. Make grieve. Marries.
Mother's and another's. Mysteries.

Nesting.

If only I hadn't minded, I used to say, but I did mind very

could ever have dared. Mind the door. Mind the glass. Mind
the fire. Mind the child. I never minded the warmth. I minded
the need. It was needed to have minded, I used to say, but was
it needed to have minded more than very much? More than I
could ever have dared?

(3)
[12″] *Intertitle:* cannot make her see reason and get out more into
the world, Chris feels he must leave the house himself. It was her
idea to live in

[3′ 48″] *Hall with front door. Chris puts his belongings in the
back of his car, seen through the windows, and leaves home,
watched by Louise and Anna. Medium framing.
Music, with VO giving way to synch dialogue as Chris leaves.*

VOICE OFF:
Transformed, I would confide.
I could have cried. I could have died.
Transformed, to cold from warmth.

The warmth.
It pacified and purified.
The warmth was far within. Hidden within.
The warmth was deep and far within.
The cold.

In labour. In hiding.
In the storm. Sheltered. Nurtured.

The warmth.
It was inside. It was in hiding.
The warmth was far within. Hidden within.
The warmth was in the centre. In the calm.
The cold.

Underneath. Beneath.
Beneath the quilt. Mothering. Covering.

The warmth.
The cold conceded nothing.
Whoever, frozen, pleaded, it conceded nothing.
The warmth consoled. The warmth was needed.
The cold.

Transformed. Preoccupied.
I could have cried. It never died.
In repose. From warmth to cold.
Frozen. Controlled.
Preoccupied.

CHRIS (*standing in doorway*): There's nothing much more to say really is there? . . . said it all. . . . Look, you've got my number haven't you? At Keith's. Just ring me if there's anything. All right. Bye Anna.

(4)
[12"] *Intertitle:* had to get a job after all and find day care for Anna. At the nursery she meets Maxine who makes the parting easier. Louise is grateful for

[1' 42"] *Day-care nursery. Louise brings Anna to the nursery, on her way to work, and leaves her with Maxine. Framing to show Louise fully for the first time.*
Synch sound.
General chatter and noise. Dialogue at end.

> LOUISE: I'll have to go now. I've got to go to work. I'll see you later. I'll collect you after tea. Goodbye. Goodbye my love.
> MAXINE: Don't worry. We'll look after her.

(5)
[12"] *Intertitle:* at the switchboard. She is not allowed to make outgoing calls, but feels she has to talk to Maxine. It is hard to concentrate when she is

[4' 55"] *Switchboard. Louise and other women at work as telephonists. Louise calls Maxine, cutting off another caller. Wide framing.*
Synch sound.
General chatter and noise. Louise on telephone.

> LOUISE: Ah, Maxine. Good. Is Anna alright? Ah, that's a relief. I knew she'd be alright with you once I'd gone. That's why I'm ringing. I don't think I'll be able to. No. It's not that really, it's just. . . . I can't talk now. I'll tell you when I come and collect Anna. We'll arrange something else perhaps. I must go now, OK?
> I'm sorry. Did I cut you off? I'm sorry. Can I reconnect you? What number did you want? I'm very sorry.

(6)
[12"] *Intertitle:* wants women to work, even needs them to, but denies them facilities and often seems almost to be punishing them for leaving their proper place

[3' 22"] *Canteen. Louise talks to other women in the canteen about the need she feels for a day-care nursery at work. Wide framing. Synch sound.*

LYN: . . . you do have to think about it, it costs a lot of
money doesn't it?

LOUISE: Well, what happened to you then?

LYN: Well, you know I have to take my Ellie to the child
minder's, well, this morning she was ill, she couldn't cope,
so I had to go right across the other side of London. The
child minder's got a friend. you know, and she helped her out –
I mean I had to go right down Holloway Road – it cost me
twice as much as usual.

LOUISE: They ought to have a nursery here, the company
ought to provide one.

LYN: Well, they should really, I mean. It would make my life
a bit easier if they did.

ANOTHER VOICE: I'm not sure. I don't really like the idea of
my kids here where I work. I like to think of work a bit
separate from the house.

CAROL: Louise, who'll foot the bill for this sort of thing then?

LOUISE: Well they're rich enough. Just a job isn't it? Look how
many mothers there are here. They've all got young children.
They've all got problems about leaving them. I know I have.
I hate leaving mine. Can't keep my mind on my work.

CAROL: Well, you are the worrying type.

LOUISE: Well, it's not that, is it? If you've got to take your
child to the nursery before you get to work no wonder you're
in a flap when you get here.

ANOTHER VOICE: What was all that about?

MARY: About nurseries, I think.

ANOTHER VOICE: What, is she worried about her kid?

MARY: Yeah, she doesn't like leaving her, you know. Coming
in, leaving her somewhere else. She's only been here a little
while but she's talking about all sorts of problems. She's right
though. We ought to have a nursery here. Yeah, we've got a
Personnel Manager, give him something to do.

ANOTHER VOICE: Probably only take it off the wages anyway.

MARY: Oh, no, not if the Union's involved. Someone should
find out what they could do about it really. I think Louise
should. I mean, it was her idea in the first place.

ANOTHER VOICE: Yeah, I suppose it depends how many people
there are who've got kids and need . . .

MARY: Yeah, I think the important thing to do is to find out
how many kids are involved and, like, the ages as well and
then take it to the Union and see if they can do anything
about it with the management.

(7)

[12"] *Intertitle:* Maxine has arranged, so that she can find out more
about the Union attitude to their day-care campaign. On the way
to the meeting, they stop

68   [2′ 14″] *Roundabout. Louise and Maxine, in the nursery van, stop at a roundabout to drop off a package on their way to a meeting. Louise asks another woman with them about the Union attitude to day care at work. Exterior, wide framing, camera travels 360° round roundabout as well as 360° pan.*
Synch sound from inside van.

> LOUISE: He should be here by now. A little boy with fair hair.
> MAXINE: I think he's got to come across the footbridge.
> WOMAN TRADE UNIONIST: What were you asking about your little girl?
> LOUISE: Well, at the moment she's in a community nursery, where Maxine works, but I was wondering if it would be better to have the nursery at work. Have the Unions thought about that?
> WOMAN: Not much really. You're lucky to get any sort of day care, let alone the one that suits you best.
> MAXINE (*to child*): Hello! Give this to your mother and say thanks for waiting.

Camera starts tracking

> CHILD: Bye!
> MAXINE: Local authorities are cutting back on nursery education anyway, aren't they?
> WOMAN: Yes, that's right. It may stimulate the women to demand more for themselves though.
> LOIUSE: Have the Unions ever done anything at all about day care?

Van heard to start up

> WOMAN: They haven't done very much. The TUC is in favour of free state nursery care for any parent who wants it. But we're a long way from that.

Van enters frame left

> LOUISE: I was wondering whether . . .
> WOMAN: There are some nurseries in the textile industry and the Unions do negotiate about child care there, but that's an industry that really depends on women's labour. Unless there's organised action around it, the Union wouldn't have any reason to take it up, it's like most things.
> MAXINE: We have to do something first if we want the Unions to take it up.
> LOUISE: How can you make people see the connection between better wages and providing day care?
> WOMAN: Well, trade unionism isn't just a question of wages struggle. It's about work conditions too, it has to be.
> LOUISE: In that case, might the Unions get involved in running nurseries?
> WOMAN: They might. All sorts of questions come up with workplace nurseries.

> Should the mothers be allowed to visit during the day?
> Should the creche stay open to let women shop before they
> collect their children? Some Unions want the employers to pay
> for company nurseries, but have the nurséries run by Unions
> and parents together.

Track ends. Pan continues for a while

(8)

[12″] *Intertitle:* her friendship with Maxine has intervened. This
affects her attitude to a lot of things, including shopping, after all
another form of women's

[3′ 41″] *Indoor shopping centre. Louise, with Anna, and Maxine
are part of the crowd in the shopping centre. Wide framing.
Music, synch sound.*

(9)

[12″] *Intertitle:* mistakes, so the Union won't take up her case.
Although she hopes to keep the campaign going from outside, she
can't help worrying

[4′ 15″] *Playground. Louise takes Anna to a playground in the
park, having lost her job. Exterior, wide framing.
Music, VO.*

> VOICE OFF: Questions arose which seemed to form a linked
> ring, each raising the next until they led the argument back
> to its original point of departure.
>
> Should women demand special working conditions for
> mothers? Can a child-care campaign attack anything funda-
> mental to women's oppression? Should women's struggle be
> concentrated on economic issues? Is domestic labour pro-
> ductive? Is the division of labour the root of the problem?
> Is exploitation outside the home better than oppression within
> it? Should women organise themselves separately from men?
> Could there be a social revolution in which women do not
> play the leading role? How does women's struggle relate to
> class struggle? Is patriarchy the main enemy for women? Does
> the oppression of women work on the unconscious as well
> as on the conscious? What would the politics of the uncon-
> scious be like? How necessary is being-a-mother to women, in
> reality or imagination? Is the family an obstacle to the libera-
> tion of women? Is the family needed to maintain sexual
> difference? What other forms of child care might there be?
> Are campaigns about child care a priority for women now?

Question after question arose, revolving in her mind without reaching any clear conclusion. They led both out into society and back into her own memory. Future and past seemed to be locked together. She felt a gathering of strength but no certainty of success.

(10)
[12"] *Intertitle:* no longer needs to keep Anna to herself. But by sending Anna to stay with her own mother, Louise has brought herself back into her own past. They

[3′ 47"] *Louise's mother's garden. Louise and Maxine visit Louise's mother, who is looking after Anna and pottering around the garden. Towards the end of the shot, Louise stands and watches her daughter and mother as they throw sticks onto the bonfire.*
Exterior, medium framing.
Music, synch sound.
General chatter and noise.

> GRANDMOTHER *(when audible)*: Let's go in the garden and have a nice time in the garden. Oh, look, they're looking at photos. You go and look at those while I go and see to the bonfire . . .
> . . . We don't want green tomatoes, do we? No, we want lovely red ones . . .
> There we are, all lovely and blazing. I like a lovely blaze . . .

(11)
[12"] *Intertitle:* both go to visit Chris at work. He is editing a film he thinks will interest them and Louise wants to tell him that she has finally reached

[7′ 05"] *Chris's editing room. Chris shows Louise and Maxine film and tapes he has been working on, about a woman artist (Mary Kelly) and her work (Post-Partum Document, ICA 1976). Louise tells him she has decided to sell the house and stay with Maxine. Tight framing, anti-clockwise pan, starting and finishing on white screen; room in darkness for second half of shot, showing images on two Steenbecks and video monitor.*
Synch sound dialogue and voice of Mary Kelly reading diaries and documents over film and tape.

> CHRIS: Do you mind, I've just got to get this film ready. Won't be a moment, okay?
> MAXINE: Okay.
> LOUISE: Right.
> MAXINE: Hey, Louise, I've got something to show you. Have you got a mirror?
> LOUISE: Here.

MAXINE (*holding mirror to packet of Camels*): See – look. It should be in mirror writing.
LOUISE: It is.
MAXINE: Now, look.
LOUISE: It's not in mirror writing. How does it work?
MAXINE: Magic. No, seriously, it's the cellophane. It acts as a special kind of filter. Puts the letters back to front again so they appear the right way round.
LOUISE: Do you know, I think camels are my favourite animals. I like the way that camel's much bigger than that pyramid. The way the desert just stretches out to the horizon. I think ·it's their shape – all lumpy and baggy, hanging over a ramshackle old skeleton.
CHRIS: Okay, I think I'm ready. Shall we start?
LOUISE: By the way, Chris, there's something I wanted to say to you. I've decided, I want to sell the house.
CHRIS: Umm, okay, if that's what you want . . .
LOUISE: Yes.
CHRIS: What about the market though? It's a bad time to sell, isn't it?
LOUISE: It's a good time for me to sell. I've decided I want to be rid of it.
CHRIS: You won't get much money for anywhere else, you know. Once we've sold the mortgage.
LOUISE: I don't think I want anywhere else. I'm going to be staying with Maxine.
MAXINE: She'll be much nearer and you'll be able to see Anna more.
LOUISE: Yes, Anna's older. She doesn't need me all the time now.
CHRIS: You mean you don't need her.
LOUISE: Well, anyway that's what we've decided, haven't we?
CHRIS: Right. Shall we start?
MAXINE: Is it work by a woman artist?
CHRIS: Yes, that's right. It's about her child and herself as the mother. I've got some film, got some video tape as well. I'll put the lights out.
VOICE OF SOUNDMAN: Mary Kelly – retaping.
VOICE OF MARY KELLY: The diaries in this document are based on recorded conversations between mother and child (that is, myself and my son) at the crucial moment of his entry into nursery school. The conversations took place at weekly inter-vals between September 7th and November 26th 1975. They came to a ' natural ' end with his/my adjustment to school. There also occurs at this moment a kind of ' splitting ' of the dyadic mother/child unit which is evident in my references, in the diaries, to the father's presence and in my son's use of pronouns (significantly ' I ') in his conversations and of implied

diagrams (for example, concentric markings and circles) in his ' drawings '. The marking process is regulated by the nursery routine, so that almost daily finished ' works ' are presented by the children to their mothers. Consequently, these markings become the logical terrain on which to map out the ' signification ' of the maternal discourse.

September 27th. I was shocked to find that he was crying when I picked him up from the nursery. I didn't think about coming early and he saw the others leave. Now he's very suspicious when I take him. I can't forgive myself for that because I should have known, although, I thought that, I was so convinced that he was different, that he is very sociable. The second day he actually screamed when I left. The teachers made me leave. I was shocked because Ray was not upset by it at all although I couldn't take him again that week. I had Sally take him the first three days and Ray took him the rest of the week. I suppose it's kind of lack of boundary definition.
    October 11th. I was distressed all this week by his apparent anxiety over going back to the nursery and I felt a bit guilty about being away teaching every day till Wednesday. He had tantrums which freaked Sally out. Thursday was the first day that I saw him and it bothered me as well.
VOICE AND CLAPPERBOARD: Roll 34 – Take 1.
VOICE OF MARY KELLY: October 24th. I was amazed that he actually said, I like school this week. At least that's sorted out but why doesn't he get over this tonsilitis? He had to go to the doctor again this week. It was a very unsatisfactory checkup, it took about one minute. It just makes me feel more responsible for him when other people don't show concern for him, but I guess I'm just as bad. I forgot to give him his medicine.

Weaning from the dyad. For both the mother and the child, the crucial moment of ' weaning ' is constituted by the intervention of a ' third term ' (that is, the father), thus consolidating the oedipal triad and undermining the Imaginary dyad which determined the inter-subjectivity of the pre-oedipal instance. This intervention situates the Imaginary ' third term ' of the primordial triangle (that is, the child as phallus) and the paternal ' image ' of the mirror phase within the dominance of the Symbolic structure through the Word of the father. That is, the mother's words referring to the authority of the ' father ', to which the real father may or may not conform.

[12"] *Intertitle:* as in dreams but takes the form of masquerade,
locked into a world of images where each needs to feel sheltered
within another's gaze to find

[10' 08"] *Maxine's room. Louise reads a transcript of a dream
back to Maxine, who is making up at a dressing table. The room
is full of mirrors.*
*Medium framing, but space fragmented by reflections and reflections
within reflections. Towards the end of the shot camera and
cinematographer are visible in one of the mirrors.*
Music, synch sound.

LOUISE: What does it mean? I can't understand most of it.
MAXINE: Pieces of thoughts I put into words. Pieces of words
which seemed to mean something and I wanted to remember.
LOUISE: What about this? What does this mean? ' They make
a groove or a pattern into which or upon which other patterns
fit or are placed unfitted and are cut by circumstances to fit.'[2]
MAXINE: I don't know. It must be something I copied out
of a book.
LOUISE: I see what it is. She felt she had been living in a fairy
tale, the oldest fairy tale that we still know, from the Valley
of the Nile. It matched with something she remembered very
clearly from her childhood.
MAXINE: Yes, I remember now – it's about how she went out
with her mother and her little brother and how her mother
laughed at them when they said they weren't going home.
Her mother just turned and went round the corner.
LOUISE: Do you know, I remember almost the same thing. I
remember sitting on the kerb and refusing to move. There
must have been something I wanted and my mother wouldn't
give it to me, and a little group of people gathered round.
MAXINE: It's like when you go to a demonstration. There's a
ring of people standing looking at you and you don't know
whose side they're on.
LOUISE: You feel very defiant and eventful.
    What about this – when was this? ' I was on a boat, sitting
on a stool in front of the mast, eating a pear which had been
cut very carefully into slices. It was a large boat, some kind
of naval vessel, because it had large guns and sailors wearing
helmets with plumes. They must have been soldiers, a whole
regiment of them. I was afraid of the soldiers. It seemed to
me that they were finding fault with me. I think it was because
they wanted to weigh anchor. So I went down to my cabin
and looked at myself in the looking glass. Only instead of

2. ' H D ': *Tribute to Freud.*

myself I saw my father carrying a saucepan. He said he had come for the wool-combing. There was going to be some kind of festival where the sheep were going to be sheared and the wool combed by women. The sheep were held down by straps. Then my father blew on a bugle and the soldiers with plumes on their helmets all came in. My father ordered me to begin combing the wool. I said, " I can't, I'm dead beat." He said that I must, or I would infect everybody at the festival with some kind of disease, or rather all the men at the festival. They all began to show horrible symptoms. They were growing gills and their entrails were falling out. I was very frightened, and picked up the comb which had a number of notches cut in it. My father began to coax me to begin combing but I was not able to. Then I noticed that standing behind my father was another man, who seemed to be lame, and perhaps some kind of priest. He asked me whether I was an oyster woman. Everybody was excited by this question, which they seemed to think was very shrewd, but I did not know what to reply. I ran to my father and seized the sauce-pan which he had been holding in his hand. It was full of jewels, which had a rind on them. When I began to shell them all the men began to grind their teeth but I carried on peeling the rind. Inside there were hundreds of tiny caraway seeds. When I looked up I saw that the lame man was wearing a feathered headdress, like an Indian Chief. I suddenly realised that all this time I had been wearing a veil. I tore it off and threw the caraway seeds at the lame man, dressed like an Indian Chief. He became all distorted and disappeared. Only my father was left. I felt very perplexed. Then he said, " You must receive communion at Easter." I realised that it was Ash Wednesday and I thought that I must be my mother, although I knew she was dead. I had a feeling of jubilation and in a very loud voice I ordered that all my father's property should be sold by auction. All the women threw away their combs and shouted, " Bravo! Well done! " They unstrapped all the sheep and knocked the helmets and military caps off the soldiers. I don't remember much more except that I was dancing on the deck of the ship, in front of a sheet of canvas or sailcloth.

Camera and camerawoman visible in frame

' There were colours and banners, and when I looked at the sea it seemed to be made of silk.' What does that mean I wonder.

MAXINE: I don't know exactly. That's why I wrote it. I hoped I'd understand it more. It has the texture of meaning.

[12"] *Intertitle:* detour through these texts, entombed now in glass, whose enigmatic script reminds her of a forgotten history and the power of a different language.

[6' 36"] *British Museum Egyptian Room. Louise and Anna, surrounded by mummified bodies and sarcophagi, puzzle over hieroglyphs. Wide framing.*
Music, VO.

> VOICE OFF: She remembered reading somewhere a passage from a book which she could no longer trace, words which had struck her at the time and which she now tried to reconstruct. ' Inscribed on the lid of the box were the words: " Anatomy Is No Longer Destiny " and inside, when she opened it, she found the figure of the Greek sphinx with full breasts and feathery wings. She lifted it up out of the box to look at it more closely. As she did so, it seemed to her that its lips moved and it spoke a few phrases in a language which she could not understand, except for three words which were repeated several times: " Capital ", " Delay " and " Body ". She replaced it in the box and closed the lid. She could feel her heart beat.'
>
> The rhythm of the sentences was not quite right and she felt sure there was some particular she had forgotten. She tried to imagine the scene as the writer might have. Would the box have been padded with cushioning, a quilted material, folds of velvet, black or red, buttoned or embroidered? What would the pattern of the embroidery be? She imagined an intricate web of curved forms, intertwined knots, like the tendrils and fronds in the marsh where, according to Bachofen, the first matriarchy arose, or the curls of pubic hair from which, according to Freud, women wove the first veil.
>
> What kind of material was the Sphinx carved from? Soft like wax or hard like agate? Ancient like amber or modern like bakelite? Were the feathers real, rippling under her heedful touch like the overlapping waves? Whatever it was she'd forgotten, it was surely something central, more weighty, not some detail of design or manufacture. Could she have known the name of the language which the Sphinx spoke? The more she tried to remember, the more she found her mind wandering, mislaying the thread of logical reconstruction and returning to images from her own childhood.
>
> She remembered how, when she had been very small, her mother had lifted her up to carry her on her hip and how she had hovered round her cot while she fell asleep. She remembered her feeling of triumph when her father left the house and the sudden presentiment of separation which

followed. There was the time when she had opened a drawer with a little key and found a piece of coral and a badge which had gone darkish green. And she remembered one morning coming into her mother's room and finding her mother's friend sleeping next to her mother, and she suddenly understood something she realised her mother had tried to explain and she felt a surge of panic, as if she'd been left behind and lost. She thought her mother would be angry, but she smiled, and, when she got out of bed, she noticed the shapes of the arch of her foot and her heel and the back of her calf.

She had been drawing acrobats, trajectories of the body and displays of skill and balance. She saw them no longer as pioneers of the ideal, but as bodies at work, expending their labour power upon its own material. She was fascinated by the gap between the feeling of bodily exertion and the task of drawing and writing, gestures which consumed themselves in their own product, giving a false sense of effortlessness which no acrobat could hope to approach.

' " Capital ", " Delay " and " Body ". She replaced it in the box and closed the lid. She could feel her heart beat. She felt giddy with success, as though, after labouring daily to prevent a relapse into her pristine humanity, she had finally got what she wanted. She shuddered. Suddenly she heard a voice, very quiet, coming from the box, the voice of the Sphinx, growing louder, until she could hear it clearly, compellingly, and she knew that it had never ever been entirely silent and that she had heard it before, all her life, since she first understood that she was a girl! '

The voice was so familiar yet so fatally easy to forget. She smiled and, in her mind, she flung herself through the air.

5 Acrobats
[05"] *Title: Figure 5*
[6' 44"] *Montage and superimposition sequence of women acrobats – rope act, floor act and juggler. Shot in black and white but central section optically printed with two colours in series. Music.*

6 Laura listening
[05"] *Title: Figure 6*
[2' 52"] *Laura Mulvey listens to tape of herself rehearsing her introduction and of the Sphinx as Voice Off. Camera set-up as in Section 2.*

LAURA (*on tape*): ' . . . into a social hieroglyphic. Later on, we

try to decipher the hieroglyphic, to get behind the secret. . . .'3
' To the patriarchy, the Sphinx, as woman, is a riddle and
a threat. But to women, who live under patriarchy. . . .'
' To the patriarchy, the Sphinx as woman is a riddle and a
threat. But women within patriarchy are faced by a never-
ending series of threats and riddles — dilemmas which are
hard for women to solve, because the culture within which
they must think is not theirs. We live in a society ruled by
the father, in which the place of the mother is suppressed.
Motherhood and how to live it, or not to live it, lies at the
root of the dilemma. And meanwhile the voice of the Sphinx
is a voice apart, a voice off.'
VOICE OFF (*on tape*): ' I was looking at an island in the glass.
It was an island of comfort in a sea of blood. It was lonely
on the island. I held tight. It was night and, in the night, I
felt the past. Each drop was red. Blood flows thicker than
milk, doesn't it? Blood shows on silk, doesn't it? It goes
quicker. Spilt. No use trying. No use replying. Spilt. It goes
stickier. The wind blew along the surface of the sea. It bled
and bled. The island was an echo of the past. It was an island
of comfort, which faded as it glinted in the glass.'

7   Puzzle ending
[05"] *Title: Figure 7*
[3' 00"] *ECU. Getting first one and then another ball of mercury
to centre of maze puzzle; maze violently shaken. Cut to black.*

[1' 45"] *Credit Titles. Music.*
Total running time: 90' 45".

Main Credits
Script and direction — Laura Mulvey and Peter Wollen. *Cinema-
tography* — Diane Tammes, assisted by Jane Jackson and Steve
Shaw. *Editing* — Carola Klein and Larry Sider. *Sound* — Larry
Sider. *Music* — Mike Ratledge. *Cast* — Dinah Stabb (*Louise*),
Merdelle Jordine (*Maxine*), Rhiannon Tise (*Anna*), Clive Merrison
(*Chris*); Marie Green (*Acrobat*), Paula Melbourne (*Rope Act*),
Crissie Trigger (*Juggler*); Mary Maddox (*Voice Off*), Mary Kelly,
Laura Mulvey. *Production* — British Film Institute.
16 mm, Colour. Shot on location in London, August-October 1976.
Budget, £19,300.

This script © Laura Mulvey and Peter Wollen 1977. Materials
from *Post-Partum Document* by kind permission of Mary Kelly.

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3. K Marx: *Capital,* Vol I, Ch 1.

Edinburgh 1977

In conjunction with its regular presentation of new films the festival is continuing its policy of organising a special event which aims to explore systematically through daily presentations, group discussions and screenings, a set of problems within film theory. This year the subject of the special event is:

History/Production/Memory (August 22nd–28th)

The main emphasis of the special events in recent years has been on ideology seen as an operation between the film text and the spectator. This year's event will attempt to situate this work by examining the problem of ideology as a social instance within particular modes of production, specific social formations and historical conjunctures, exploring such key concepts as dominance and the question of the articulation of historical materialism with language and the unconscious.

Screenings will be organised around four areas: Ealing Studios, the popular memory debate, Vertov and the Soviet Avant-Garde of the 1920s, and British political documentary in the 1930s. There will also be a forum on independent film in Britain in the 1970s, involving film-makers, distributors/exhibitors and critics in which the problems raised at the event can be discussed in relation to current film-making practice.

Speakers will include: Stephen Crofts, John Ellis, Stephen Heath, Claire Johnston, Annette Kuhn, Olivia Rose, Keith Tribe, and members of the Glasgow SEFT group.

Edinburgh 1977 Magazine

The second issue of Edinburgh's annual publication which seeks to provide critical and theoretical work to accompany the special event and the festival's practice in general.

The 1977 issue will include: Colin MacCabe on history and memory, Foucault/Rancière/Narboni on popular memory, Geoffrey Nowell-Smith on the writing of history, John Caughie on TV.

To Attend

The event has a subscription fee of £12 or $24 (students £8 or $16). The fee includes access to over twenty event films, participation in seminars and a copy of the magazine (to be sent out in advance). The magazine is also available separately at £1.50 or $6 (including airmail postage).

Only a limited number of places are available: priority will be given to those who apply before August 1st.

Applications to: Edinburgh Film Festival Council,
3 Randolph Crescent,
Edinburgh EH3 7TJ (Tel.: 031-225 1671)

Deke Dusinberre

Here are two uneasy paragraphs which, as I've pondered them, have impressed themselves upon me quite vividly as a ' green ' passage against a ' red ' passage. Consider first the ' green ':

' Suppressed in Anglo/Saxon structural and structural/materialist films is *any attempt* at theory. Advanced (mainly French) theory (not necessarily directly concerning film) is either not capable of dealing with film or else posits retrograde, illusionist, post-Bazinian manifestations of such. With the (at best) nearly total demise (flourishing) of New American Cinema mainly through its resurgent romanticism, or (at worst) its continued operation as pseudo-narrative investigations, there remain the few English (one Canadian, one Austrian) *structural/materialist film-makers*, lamentably largely existing without the beginnings even of a theoretical/historical approach.'

Next the ' red ':

' . . . A more important issue centres on whether or not the objects viewed are intensified, ironically, through the very denial of any complacent recognition of them. . . . Gidal's seemingly banal images would thus function pointedly and specifically; would, in fact, situate the film in connection with the acknowledged influence (on Gidal) of the work of Beckett, in which banalised action ironically intensifies the personal drama. An elaboration of this type of analysis of *Room Film 1973* would probably posit a specific subject (Gidal) performing a phenomenological reduction on the objects in the real world.'

I awarded the paragraphs their colours solely on the basis of my own rather strict education in English Composition as a youth; weekly compositions were first farmed out to ' lay readers ' who zealously pointed to lapses in grammar and syntax with their green-inked pens, and subsequently were corrected ' for content ' by the teacher's own sacred red pen. And so the following week I would be confronted with my literary efforts gaily and thoroughly decor-ated in green and red.

If there is a clearer way to reinforce the distinction between ' form ' and ' content ' I have yet to encounter it. As an artifice, it has not necessarily stood me in good stead.

Yet the first passage – from Peter Gidal's ' Theory and Definition

of Structural/Materialist Film '[1] – I would tend to dismiss as hopelessly green, sure that when 'properly' rewritten as a single coherent sentence its content would be neither significant nor profound enough to merit the expenditure of much red ink. The second passage – my own[2] – remains red because the attempt to account for a certain quality in Gidal's work via Beckett is clearly important, but the tentativeness and incompleteness of that attempt render the entire paragraph inadequate.

That colour-consciousness precluded the ability to make an important comparison. It is the intensely 'subjective' quality of Gidal's work – in both film and theory – which has confounded me; the attempt to understand this subjective quality in films of a fundamentally formal nature (a subjective quality exemplified by a hand-held, restlessly roving camera technique) led to a comparison with the dramatic work of Beckett (a comparison informed by an awareness of Gidal's background in theatre and psychology and his enthusiasm for Beckett) which yielded an unsatisfactory analysis of the subjective perception of objects within a highly limited field (eg a room). But a bit of calculated colour-blindness coupled with a re-reading of Beckett's 'subjectivity' yields a much more pertinent comparison, at once casting Gidal's theoretical work in a much more sympathetic light and elucidating the function of the subject in Gidal's films.

It is important to consider briefly the way Beckett's novels (which, it might be argued, form the substance of his literary achievement – as opposed to the more familiar plays) have not only intensified the role of the first-person narrator as the sole speaking subject but have simultaneously extended the strategies of contradiction and hyperbole at every level of construction, effectively undermining what would otherwise appear as simple – and relentlessly pessimistic – solipsism. On the broadest level, a major shift can easily be traced through the early novels – *More Pricks Than Kicks, Murphy, Watt* – in which the speaking subject develops from an omniscient narrator to a fully participating witness. up to the magnificent mature trilogy – *Molloy, Malone Dies, The Unnamable* – in which each speaking subject limits his discourse to an internalised monologue. But those monologues incorporate contradictions which interrogate the very act of relating, of speaking as a unified subject. Thus *Molloy* is organised as two long monologues, ostensibly by discrete characters (Molloy and Moran), although as the latter monologue progresses the convergence of the two is suggested on several planes (did Molloy and Moran meet? are they perhaps identical? does the latter monologue

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1. As originally published in *Studio International*, Nov/Dec 1975, p 193.
2. 'The Ascetic Task', *Structural Film Anthology* (Gidal ed), London 1976, p 113.

historically precede the former?) and each monologue offers an increasingly fragmented and disintegrated notion of speaking sub- ject which is unquestionably tantamount to the fragmentation of the authorial voice of Beckett.

Molloy begins: 'I am in my mother's room. It's I who live there now. I don't know how I got there. Perhaps in an ambulance, certainly a vehicle of some kind. I was helped. I'd never have got there alone.' The repetition and substitution (note how the implicit 'here' of the first sentence is replaced by the contradictory 'there') create a sense of ambivalence and distance on the part of the speaking subject which is reiterated twenty pages later: 'Not to want to say, not to know what you want to say, not to be able to say what you think you want to say, and never stop saying, or hardly ever, that is the thing to keep in mind, even in the heat of composition.' And again, another twenty pages on:

'Yes, the words I heard, and heard distinctly, having quite a sensitive ear, were heard a first time, then a second, and often even a third, as pure sounds, free of all meaning, and this is probably one of the reasons why conversation was unspeakably painful to me. And the words I uttered myself, and which must nearly always have gone with an effort of the intelligence, were often to me as the buzzing of an insect.'

The subversion of the unified authorial voice is simple and explicit in the latter monologue (Moran's) in which the closing sentences (' It was not midnight. It was not raining.') challenge the authority of the opening sentences (' It is midnight. The rain is beating on the windows.'). Both voices are authorial, neither authoritative.

Beckett further exposed the fabric of his fiction – indeed, of all writing – by stressing repetition and contradiction more insistently. Number III of the *Texts for Nothing* commences: 'Leave, I was going to say leave all that. What matter who's speaking, someone said what matter who's speaking. There's going to be a departure. I'll be there, I won't miss it, it won't be me, I'll be here, I'll say I'm far from here, it won't be me, I won't say anything, there's going to be a story, someone's going to try and tell a story.' Or, more starkly, *The Unnamable*: 'Where now? Who now? When now? Unquestioning. I, say I. Unbelieving. Ques- tions, hypotheses, call them that. Keep going, going on, call that going, call that on.' The carefully balanced syntax of repetition and contradiction effectively increases the stress on the speaking subject until that subjectivity ironically disintegrates. There is no single, unified, speaking subject – not even an ultimate authorial voice – there is only the fragmentary composite of subjective voices.

The implications of Beckett's dissolution of the unified subject have not been lost on Gidal. In an article published in 1974 (the point at which, in my opinion, his film work reached a level of

82   maturity) in *Studio International*, he quotes Beckett on precisely
this point: 'At the end of my work, there's nothing but dust. In
L'Innommable there's complete disintegration. No "I", no "have",
no "being". No nominative, no accusative, no verb. There's no
way to go on.'[3] Beckett, of course, is being characteristically ironic,
simultaneously describing the final dissolution predicated by his
writing and contradicting that description in so far as he does go
on, must go on. even if there is no way. and actually concludes
L'Innommable with the assertion, '... I'll go on.' In the same article
Gidal describes the monologue as a 'structural device' defined by
repetition: 'Such continuance of the word flow is defined as a
monologue; obsessive verbal reptition by constantly re-attempting
to define reality "repeats" itself. . . . Obsessive repetition is not
an image of mental claustrophobia, it is it.'[4] It is now clear that
the disintegration of the unified subject through contradiction,
repetition, hyperstress, is precisely what Gidal learned from
Beckett. Especially, Gidal has adopted that trope of contradiction –
the oxymoron – as his emblem.

In Gidal's own prose we begin to get a sense of how he utilises
these tactics. The 'Theory and Definition of Structural/Materialist
Film' as a whole reads as a series of more or less disjointed
monologues with headings such as 'Devices', 'Dialectic', 'Read-
ing Duration' etc. Though occasionally cross-referenced, there does
not seem to be a precise sense of linear order; the conclusion that
they may be read in any order is reinforced by the absurdly long
and digressive footnotes – monologues in themselves – which can
only be digested if they are read continuously as the final section
of the essay and not as interjections in the main text. In short,
the overall impression is not one of linear argument, but one of
fragmented comment. That comment is further fragmented by an
oxymoronic vocabulary and contradictory phrase structure. Turning
again to the passage cited at the outset, we can see how words
and phrases turn on themselves. An extremely literal reading of the
passage – green pen at the ready – with the express purpose of
determining a single, linear argument provides an admittedly absurd
précis, an absurdity which disrupts the assumed unity of the
authorial voice. We begin the passage with the expectation of dis-
covering a suppressed film theory or two, but then learn that
'advanced' theory does not directly concern film or else 'posits
retrograde, illusionist, post-Bazinian manifestations of such.' We
shudder in anticipation of a description of *reactionary* theory, but
are left with the conclusion that advanced film-makers are 'lament-
ably largely existing without the beginning even' of advanced

3. Quoted by Gidal in 'Beckett and Others and Art: A System',
   Studio International, November 1974, p 187, from Duckworth:
   Samuel Beckett: En Attendant Godot, London 1966.
4. Gidal: art cit, p 186.

theory. Meanwhile, we have detoured past two literal oxymoronic
constructions, one asserting that the ' flourishing ' New American
Cinema is in ' total demise ' and the other (most delightful of all)
affirming that the only English structural/materialist film-makers
(there are two) are Canadian and Austrian respectively (which re-
assures us that they are distinct from the ' Anglo/Saxon structural '
film-makers).

Deliberately, Gidal places his prose beyond the reach of any
green pen known to humankind. Which is not to say that a less
picayune reading won't convey a general gist which, in this instance,
might be stated thus: ' As to the theoretical practice of film theory,
nothing at all seems to have been even begun.' Which of course is
precisely how Gidal himself reiterates the initial passage two sen-
tences later, playing on his own constant beginnings and re-
beginnings which seem not to ' have even been begun '. Reiteration/
repetition is a ploy which Gidal consistently uses to push the reader
back off a complacent acceptance of the words themselves. Hence
' Jacques Derrida has clearly clarified what in fact is at stake in a
work, in the procedure of constituting a work.' Not only is there
the obviously ironic stress on ' clearly clarified ' (Derrida! Gidal!!)
but also the calculated redundancy of ' procedure ' and ' constitut-
ing ': verbs, participles, nouns of ' coming into being ' play an
important role in any Gidal text. One can practically feel the
following sentence being dragged into being, in spurts and starts:
' To begin with, radical art, an art of radical form, deals with the
manipulation of materials made conscious, and with the inexpres-
sible, the unsayable, ie, not with content, as it is understood as
distinguishable and primary, positing a transparent technique.'[5]
By the end of the sentence, the reader has lost a sense of the
clause/phrase relationships − they all seem more or less inde-
pendent. That Gidal perceives practice and theory as inextricably
related is evident in that in theoretical writing − as well as film
practice − he eschews a ' transparent technique ' to the extent of
adopting an almost opaque style.

Almost. Attempts have been made to clarify it by rationalising
the grammar and vocabulary. This is most striking in the version
of ' Theory and Definition of Structural/Materialist Film ' which
appeared in the BFI's *Structural Film Anthology* some six months
after the original text appeared in *Studio International*. An earnest
editor at the BFI struggled to tighten up the text. Compare this
edited paragraph with our original passage:

' Anglo/American Structural and Structural/Materialist film has
so far failed to attract any attempt at theory. Advanced − mainly
French − theory (not necessarily concerning film directly) is either
not capable of dealing with film or posits retrograde illusionist,

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5. ibid, p 183.

84 post-Bazinian manifestations of film. With the (at best) nearly total demise of New American Cinema, mainly through its resurgent romanticism or (worst) its continued operation as pseudo-narrative investigations, there remain the few English (plus one Canadian and one Austrian) Structural/Materialist film-makers, who are working to a great extent without the beginnings of a theoretical/historical approach.'[6]

The very tightness of this version closes the gaps and foreshortens the distance created by Gidal's self-conscious use of language. Here there is no ambiguity, no *frisson* of contradiction and repetition, no humour; and very little work is required to ' make sense ' of the passage. It is an impoverished version precisely in so far as *it* now ' makes sense ', thereby relieving the *reader* of the responsibility of ' making sense '.

The assumption that the text should not only make sense but should articulate a unified position is one that led Anne Cottringer to critique Gidal's theoretical position.[7] Her frustration is almost tangible, as she opens and concludes her piece with the observation that ' riddling the article is an eclectic, contradictory terminology ' creating ' confusions which permeate the piece '. But she bravely counters many of his assertions and comparative analyses – notably Gidal's notorious conflation of ' materiality ' with ' materialism ' – and her criticism would be seen to be essentially correct *if* there were a unified position being articulated. But there is no *univocal* position, Gidal simply doesn't permit one to exist. It follows then that his various quotations – from Brecht, Derrida, Althusser, Foucault, etc – operate not just as pretentious name-dropping nor as theoretical substantiation (Cottringer expends much energy attempting to determine whether or not Gidal has correctly conveyed and utilised the meaning of the authors he quotes) but rather reinforces the collage effect of the various monologues and offers different voices which (usually) formulate ideas in a similarly complex and tortuous manner. Thus after quoting William Rubin quoting Frank Stella, Gidal admits, ' I quote the above with the full awareness that the statements broaden the parameters and raise as many confusions as they attempt to close up, yet in relation to the problematical, humanistic, ideology of process, Stella was more aware than most. And this his painting at its best is also clear on ' [sic].[8] Cottringer glimpsed the way out of this prosaic morass when she noted that the ' radical political aspiration of the

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6. *Structural Film Anthology*, op cit, p 13. Though this anthology was edited by Gidal, his own introduction was edited at the BFI by Jonathan Rosenbaum.

7. Cottringer: ' On Peter Gidal's Theory and Definition of Structural/Materialist Film ', *Afterimage* n 6, Summer 1976, pp 86-95.

8. ' Theory and Definition ' etc, *Studio International*, Nov/Dec 1975 (cit), p 195.

avant-garde is the possibility that it offers of a different articulation
of the subject.'[9] She was alluding to film; if we stretch the allusion
to include writing, the ' problems ' of Gidal's theory dissolve along
with the dissolution of the unified speaking subject.

That this insight is not immediately apparent is the result of
several factors. First, the strategy Gidal shares with Beckett – an
attack on the complacent acquisition of meaning by collapsing an
apparently unified speaking subject into the fragmented voice of
contradiction – has become a recognisable and assimilable fictive
device over the last quarter of a century. However, to apply the
same strategy to theoretical writing – where the speaking subject
is still assumed to be coherent, unified, and identical with a real
and specific author – currently strikes us as outrageous. At the
same time, it is impossible adequately to trace Gidal's fragmenta-
tion of the speaking subject on the basis of his prose alone; his
writing has been sporadic, and a line of development – from the
straightforward *Andy Warhol* (1971), the rather conventional (if
discursive) ' Film as Materialist Consumer Product ' (1970)[10] and
' Film as Film ' (1972),[11] through the desultory programme notes
of the ensuing years up to his analysis of Beckett (1974) and the
first formulation of the ' Theory and Definition . . . ' – does not
clearly emerge. Thus when we are confronted with oxymoronic
axioms in the current text – eg: ' Any represented content exists
beneath the structure (or above it) ' and: ' In fact, the real content
is the form, form become content ' – there is no immediate context
in which to place the contradictions. Finally, although his work
shares much with that of Beckett, it is impossible to claim for
Gidal's writing the resonance and complexity and irony of Beckett's
masterful prose.

It is imperative, then, to seek this dissolution of the speaking
subject in Gidal's film-making, a consistent activity since 1967. For
Gidal is primarily a film-maker (and only secondarily a theoretician)
and therefore first confronts and works through issues practically,
and only then theoretically. So it is hardly surprising that Gidal's
theoretical prose style presents problems similar to the ' formalist
dilemma ' broached by his mature films, in which radical formal
strategies render the processes of representation so arbitrary that
they run the risk of lapsing into meaningless tautology.[12] Since this
formalist dilemma ultimately implies a shift in the location of the
responsibility for meaning-making and since it has engaged – at one
point or another – all of the modernist arts, it might be useful
here to extend the notion of subject to describe both the ' artistic
subject ' (the ' maker ' – writer, film-maker, painter, etc) and the

9. Cottringer, art cit, p 94.
10. *Cinemantics*, n 1, January 1970 and n 3, July 1970.
11. *Art and Artists*, December 1972, pp 12-14.
12. For a fuller discussion of the ' formalist dilemma ', see ' The
    Ascetic Task ', cit.

'aesthetic subject' (the 'perceiver'); this makes clearer the idea of a general shift of meaning-making responsibility along an axis of subjects intersected by the art object. In a specifically cinematic context, this means that the history of the avant-garde can be seen as a continual reassessment of the location and responsibility of meaning-making subjects. Most pertinently, the films of Stan Brakhage in the late 1950s set themselves against the industrial anonymity of Hollywood in their intense emphasis on personal vision and the privileged gesture of the artistic subject which resulted in the epiphany of that subject, the complete identification of film-maker with the camera and/or images yielded by manipulation of that camera. Warhol's subsequent attack on that stance – through the simple but devastating technique of turning on the camera and walking away – effectively evacuated any sense of artistic subject (abandoning intentionality in terms of an author, a film-maker, or even camera-operator) and emphasised the absolute arbitrariness of perspective offered by the film frame as mechanical compositional device. The immense influence Warhol's work initially had on Gidal cannot be overstated. But the order of dilemma posed by Warhol's films (those up to *Chelsea Girls*, 1967) was, of course, immediately clear: the complete abdication of the artistic subject left no room for further work. This, then, formed the basis of Gidal's own project, a project which would take several years to manifest itself: to re-inscribe a *new* artistic voice into his films while escaping the cinematic solipsism exemplified by the films of Brakhage (just as Beckett had to escape the solipsism implicit in an intensified authorial voice). The eventual formulation of a new and fragmented artistic subject is represented in the mature aesthetic of Gidal as evidenced in *Room Film 1973* and subsequent films. But Gidal's struggle to realise this project is perhaps most clear in the transitional films of 1969-72.

These early films illustrate Gidal's attempts to formulate a complex notion of subject through a shifting relationship between an image and its presentation. *Clouds* (1969, 10 mins), for example, follows Warhol in its minimal and repetitive image in which framing plays a key role (an aeroplane makes fugitive appearances at various edges of a frame otherwise composed of almost invisibly white clouds); but, significantly, Gidal photographed it with a hand-held camera which underscores the act of film and the presence of the film-maker, though the banality of the image and the arbitrary repetitiveness (an indiscernible loop) and the arbitrary framing tend to frustrate expectations of intentionality on the part of the artistic subject.

In *Portrait (Subject – Object)* (1970, 10 mins), Gidal attempted to assert the presence of the artistic subject in a different fashion. Again, one detects Warhol's shadow in the starkly composed black and white image of a rather passive, bored woman who remains impassive to the camera's stare (cf Warhol's *13 Most Beautiful*

Women). But here Gidal abandons the rigid stare of Warhol and mobilises the camera in a way which evokes the lyric mode of Brakhage, with the significant exception that in *Portrait (Subject – Object)* the gesture and movement are not privileged or pregnant with significance, but merely offer shifting perspectives on the image with apparently random motivation.

The greyness of *Portrait* attained an ascetic rigour in *Takes* (1971, 5 mins) as Gidal repeatedly rephotographed an image off the screen at an increasingly acute angle, thus warping the shifting perspective on the 'same' image. The image itself is extremely important – that of a woman taking off her bra – since it directly invokes the voyeuristic relationship of viewer to image and also to Gidal as mediator of that image (due to his rejection of a conventionally complacent voyeuristic mediation and his adoption of a fragmented, reconstructed stance). Here Gidal makes explicit the polar opposites which give a certain tension to all his work: the seductive involvement of a voyeuristic relationship to the image as against the alienation resulting from a rigorous formal intervention.

8 mm Film Notes on 16 mm (1971, 40 mins) represents an ambitious attempt to arrive at a formal solution which would permit more extended work on this issue. Its length incorporates an aggressive duration in addition to repetition, implying an endlessness which demands a reorientation of concentration and rejects linear signification. The various types of 'home movie' footage (from banal to erotic) again anticipate a shift in the spectator's approach to the image, but these images are subordinated to the dominating tactic of yanking the footage through a 16 mm printer at a speed rendering most of it illegible. Hence the audience is forced to grasp at the images and ultimately to grasp at meaning. But by inserting oneself into that system of meaning-making on such a profound level, the aesthetic subject must accept the fragmentation and disintegration of the artistic subject; recognising this, Gidal could consolidate his efforts and produce a body of films which reinscribe the artistic subject into a complex space which constantly challenges the position of that subject.

This schematic description of a few of the films of this period is not an adequate analysis of the work, but it does begin to clarify the role of the artistic subject in the more recent and familiar Gidal films such as *Condition of Illusion, C/O/N/S/T/R/U/C/T,* and *Filmprint,* and rescues them from alternate allegations of self-indulgent solipsism or mechanical vacuity; more relevant to this discussion, however, it also offers us a way to rewrite our 'red' paragraph. In less disciplined moments we might be tempted to consider Gidal's formulation of a fragmented artistic subject whose location must be inferred by the aesthetic subject in the tradition of Hebraic theology which describes G-d as that which cannot be named but merely alluded to, a G-d not manifest but potential (in

88   the messiah, and in the devout), and consider it also in the light
of Derrida's similar invocation of differance as apparent only in
the traces of what is *not* signified; but we content ourselves with
the obvious and inescapable conclusion that *Room Film 1973* does
not ' posit a specific subject performing a phenomenological reduc-
tion ' but that its tactics of repetition and contradiction and
illegibility posit a non-specific and fragmented artistic subject enter-
ing the complex social practice of image-making on film in a way
which urgently engages the aesthetic subject in the process of
meaning-making. That Gidal succeeds in this through a Beckettian
strategy of simultaneously intensifying and contradicting a unified
subjectivity to the point of distintegration could only become clear
through an analysis which recognises that Gidal regards neither
the ' voice ' of the theoretician nor the ' eye ' of the film-maker
as a privileged or transcendent subject, but insists on their
inscription – on all levels – as operative factors in theoretical and
cinematic discourse.

RED LETTERS

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Philip Rosen

Much of the most productive recent work in film study has con-
cerned itself with the notion of the ' classicál cinema ', in the
sense of a formal/stylistic paradigm or set of codes associated
historically with the industrial-artistic complex known in shorthand
as Hollywood. This paradigm has been studied both in relation to
other paradigms (see the work on Ozu by Edward Branigan and
by David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson in *Screen* v 17 n 2,
Summer 1976) and in terms of its ideological determinations and
effects. Thus Nöel Burch and Jorge Dana have argued (' Proposi-
tions ', *Aftcrimage* 5, 1974, pp 40-66) that the cinema of Minnelli,
Welles and Ophuls is one which unquestioningly accepts the
' dominant codes ' and is therefore subject to ideological determina-
tion, whereas the work of Dreyer, by putting the codes in crisis,
also finds means to escape, at least partially, from its overdeter-
mination by ideology.

   In this article I shall argue that, for a variety of reasons, the
fit between dominant codes and dominant ideology is by no means
so close as it has been claimed to be. A film can perfectly well
belong within the classical paradigm and yet not be totally account-
able for in terms of a system of ' dominant codes ' – a phrase of
which we are still investigating the second component and have
barely begun investigation of the first in terms specific to cinema.
Meanwhile the relation of these to ' ideology ' and the way ideology
is – negatively or positively – inscribed within a film is also still
very much an open question. What I hope to show, in relation to
a particular film – Frank Borzage's *Seventh Heaven* – is that even
within the classical paradigm gaps are constantly opened which
make highly problematic any subsumption of film into a perfectly
closed system, whether of ' dominant codes ' or of ideology.

I
Consider any cut. It is a disruption of space and time which
permits the juxtaposition of what one can call two different events.
These events are different because they were photographically
recorded at different times and occupy different spaces in relation
to the camera's viewfinder.

   This spatio-temporal disruption between what is imprinted in
one shot and what is imprinted in the next is possible because part
of the temporal (and therefore spatial) segment apparently recorded

90 by two contiguous frames is left out. There is a spatio-temporal blank between even two frames of a ' sequence-shot '. There is a gap where nothing is recorded, no light captured. This gap is necessary to the workings of the camera/projector mechanism and to our perceptual apparatus. As the shutter hides the blank spot, the machine's pull-down claw does its work unnoticed and we read several distinct photographic images as one continuous cinematic image.

Even the knowledgeable viewer will miss this gap between individual frames. But such a viewer will see the gap as it appears between shots, as in, for example, several frames of close-up/CUT/ several frames of medium shot. Every cut is visible evidence of the inescapable gaps between frames, the absences which exist un-perceived in each shot of a film. Every cut marks a difference without which the cinema would not exist, the difference between any two contiguous frames. This mark occurs in the gap between frames, and the absence that makes this mark possible is one of the necessities for cinema as we know it.

There is an obvious analogy which can be drawn between this cinematic process and the general signifying chains modelled by classical (Saussurean) semiotics. The intelligibility of an individual element of a semiotic chain is similarly dependent on its difference from the immediately contiguous elements of the chain. This similarity is the basis for considering the sequentiation permitted by shot-to-shot difference as a kind of formal structuration which is linked to and manifested in the operations of all the codes of a film.[1]

In this context, what is striking about the Hollywood cinema is the fact that it promulgated a method of film-making whose dis-tinguishing traits can be described as having been founded on effacing the visibility of difference. This resulted in the rapid formulation of the codes of invisible editing; for example, marking the gap between shots with a movement within the diegetic space which, even as it marks the gap, distracts spectators' attention from it. The cause and effect of this effacement was a goal of focussing on the diegetic space of a film as both autonomous and yet ' real ' — that is, the construction of a mimesis.

The emphasis on the fictional world as the immediate focus of spectator attention has as its corollaries a storehouse of devices which supplement invisible editing codes, such as conventions of

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1. Perhaps it should be emphasised that the point of this formulation is not to locate a ' foundation ' or an ' origin ' of the cinema. Rather, it serves as a methodological convenience and a rhetorical device which opens an exploration of certain critical approaches to the structural complexities of filmic signification.

   Although I am using Derrida's analysis of Saussure for different purposes, some of his arguments have obviously been important to me throughout this essay. See Jacques Derrida, ' Differance ' in *Speech and Phenomena*, Evanston 1973, pp 129-160, esp pp 139-141.

camera placement and movement, musical codes, and so forth.
Ultimately all are used to guide the spectator through an ordered
series of events in a fictional world, which is to say through a
narrative.

Even when the effacement of shot-to-shot differences was
obviously broken down in the classical cinema, such instances were
bracketed as unique types of signifying segments; for example,
1930s ' montage sequences ', where spatially and temporally dis-
junctive fragments of the fictional world were linked to form a
segment which bridged larger gaps in the narrative as a whole. If
one considers such a segment as a network of absences, normally
veiled but here exposed, then one sees how the inescapability of
gap, which was a danger to the mimesis – always threatening to
tear open the fabric of the fictional world by revealing itself in
such mistakes as obvious mismatches – could even be incorporated
into its own effacement to be used as a (misleading) signifier of its
own ' absence '. This absence of an absence was necessary to
classical cinematic mimesis.

So shot-to-shot continuity and coherence were made possible by
the continuity and coherence of the space of a fictional world. This
world was furnished by a narrative. Thus, the classical cinema fits
itself into the framework of historically embedded traditions of
narrativity, drawing on existing models of storytelling to produce
that coherence and therefore to produce itself. The narrative world
served to displace differences, gaps, necessary absences at the level
of editing continuity. These were covered with a complex, implicitly
unified ' surface '. Therefore, much of the most forceful signification
seemed to occur within shots rather than between them. It seems
logical that the critical idolising of the American studio cinema by
Bazin-influenced French critics of the 1950s was based on the
criticism of mise-en-scène.

II

What early silent film-makers showed was how to analyse a scene
by means of a system of invisible editing which, as Bazin teaches,
maintained an illusion of continuous space-time necessary to the
narrative flow while giving the film-maker the privilege of
emphasising any component of the mise-en-scène that seemed
desirable. It is now common to associate the impulses operating
at this level with those operating in the nineteenth-century novel,
which ultimately involve a demand for analysis of character within
the text. But analysis of scene through selective emphasis of mise-
en-scène does not automatically mean analysis of character, of
' psychology '. The mise-en-scène must still in some way (not neces-
sarily one-to-one correspondence) be made to stand for interior
processes.

While considering the kinds of character analyses open to

novelists and film-makers, Thomas Elsaesser has argued that the Hollywood film establishes a tension between 'realistic' representation and the use of a kind of 'pathetic fallacy' whereby objects in the setting can be read as mental projections, articulated in various ways while retaining a real-world status.[2] What he is here outlining – principally in reference to the sound film between 1940 and 1968, but his remarks would stand equally for the silent cinema – is in fact another aspect of the principle of difference. The mise-en-scène must simultaneously provide a mimetic field within which the characters operate *and* serve the 'novelistic' purpose of analysing those characters. It must at some level double the audience's world, yet become a signifying system, a network of substances which are more than mere substances because they 'have meaning'. In fact, it is precisely those elements of the mimesis that become strongly pertinent signifiers in the analytic system which mark the difference between the order of the audience's world and the order of the fictional world. In the audience's world an individual, within the framework of his or her culture, must supply his or her own pathetic fallacy; in the fictional world it is supplied for us by its placement within the context of a narrative signifying chain.[3]

III

By now the view that the complex of signifying elements in a narrative can be comprehended as a whole and reduced to a finite series of binary oppositions as signifieds is well known. In Lévi-Straussian analysis, the two terms of the oppositions ultimately translate into contradictions unresolvable in life but resolved in the narrative. This resolvability of contradictions presumably constitutes the 'semantic' difference between the set of signifying chains that makes up the narrative and a category of 'lived experience'; that is, the difference between fiction and 'reality'.

Lévi-Strauss himself was, of course, only concerned with primitive myths. But the general notion of resolving contradictions in narrative discourse can be linked to a good operational definition of the classical cinema: that kind of narrative film-making which attempts to efface difference at every possible level of signifying relation-

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2. Thomas Elsaesser, 'Film and the Novel: Reality and Realism of the Cinema', *Twentieth Century Studies*, n 9, September 1973, pp 58-62.

3. Of course, there is the theoretical alternative not explored in this essay, namely films in which there is no effort to displace shot-to-shot difference onto the mise-en-scène. This alternative involves weakening and even eliminating the relationship of referentiality between the universe of the text and the world of the audience. To examine this alternative would involve analysis of abstract cinema on the one hand and of the so-called 'excesses' of Eisenstein (some of the intellectual montage in *October*, for example) on the other.

ship, namely between signifier and signifier (narrative continuity 93
achieved through invisible editing codes and their corollaries);
between signifier and signified/referent (' the classic realist text ');
between signified and signified (semantic unity achieved through
narrative resolution and closure).

However, it has been widely argued recently that the absences
and gaps imposed by the necessity of difference are never over-
come, even in narrative.[4] In this view the idea of narrative closure
is itself a kind of myth or ideology. To analyse and evaluate a text
simply from the viewpoint of narrative closure is to take the text
on its own terms without establishing any theoretical perspective
on it. Instead one must consider the possibility that these gaps
are' not eliminated and contradictions not resolved. Rather,
differences are displaced to various levels of the text in a relatively
free but determinate system within which the absences that mark
difference are relocated from level to level. Figuratively speaking,
then, a text may be ' opened ' at any point where a difference is
(dis)located, and following the displacements of an absence among
various levels of the text is the strategy for interesting readings.

In that case it is necessary to assume that there are signifiers
which fill in the absences, much like the movement which covers a
cut in invisible editing. Such signifiers mark the displacements and
condensations that such an approach posits, and the critical act
would be a search for and interrogation of those signifiers. It is
interesting to note that in this view criticism shows narrative to
be not a place where contradictions are resolved, but rather a place
where they are identified. Ultimately, then, an important knowledge
function is imputed to the act of criticism.

One possible tactic for such a critical approach would be pre-
liminary acceptance of methodology derived from Lévi-Strauss in
order to point out contradictions central to the narrative. But
then, instead of assuming their resolution, the critic would trace
the dislocation of the gaps between oppositional terms through
several levels or aspects of the film as narrative and cinematic
process. However, there is no reason that the location of gaps
between terms cannot begin from ' traditional ' criticism. Either
way, one starts with some ' semantics ' of the film, then interro-
gates absences both to find out how that initial meaning was
produced and to refine the initial formulation of meaning.

Thus, to put it as schematically as possible, the critic gets
from signified-signified differences (the semantic) to signifier-
signifier differences (the syntagmatic) by examining signifier-
signified relationships and the way they shift. The concept of
difference is what permits the examination to occur. This is, first,
because difference is common to all three levels, but as a specific

4. See Paul Willemen, ' Notes Towards the Construction of Readings
of Tourneur ' in *Jacques Tourneur*, Edinburgh 1975, pp 16-35.

modality to each; and, second, because it imposes the defining limitations on the objects of inquiry.

IV

From this perspective, I proceed to a consideration of *Seventh Heaven*, a 1927 non-dialogue film with recorded music. It is an obvious product of the classical cinema; that is, its style is within the framework of invisible editing codes and their corollaries. Even at the time of distribution it was recognised as a model of its type, and won Frank Borzage the Academy Award for best direction.

I am starting the analysis with some of the generalisations made by John Belton in his useful auteur analysis of Borzage.[5] Belton is by no means a structuralist, but he nevertheless perceives a series of antinomies in the work of Borzage. He thus provides a handy group of semantic oppositions which can serve as the starting point for an analysis.

Considering Borzage as a director of melodrama, Belton notes the tendency of melodrama toward the externalisation of internal conflicts. (Considering remarks made above, there is an obvious thesis implied about the propensity of the classical cinema for the ' melodramatic '.) A typical melodramatic situation is thus ' two-dimensional characters often at the mercy of a hostile environment or an extension of that environment (villain) '. To follow and extend Belton, that environment corresponds in some way to the internal states of the characters. He points out that in Griffith, another famous director of melodrama, the physical environment/background embodies essential moral attributes and relations, especially those pertaining to the family unit. Therefore, the setting may exert a strong force on his characters. The resolution in depth characteristic of so many Griffith films is a logical outgrowth of the importance of environment.

Unlike Griffith, Borzage reduces the power of the physical world through such devices as shallow focus and even lighting. This allows him to concentrate more on character in itself. Furthermore, by blurring over the world external to his characters, Borzage softens the sharp moral contrasts which the environment often embodies in melodramas. Moral conflicts diminish in centrality and individual spiritual development is explored. That is, Borzage de-emphasises the essences carried by the physical environment, and essence is seen to lie beyond the physical in the spiritual. The physical impact of environment on characters is thus shown to be

5. John Belton, ' Souls Made Great by Love and Adversity: Frank Borzage ', *Monogram* 4, 1973, pp 20-23. This article was modified and extended by Belton in *The Hollywood Professionals: Howard Hawks, Frank Borzage, Edgar G Ulmer*, New York 1974, pp 75-147. Here I am relying on his more concentrated presentation in *Monogram*.

less important because it does not carry as much thematic weight. Ultimately the physical backgrounds are there only to be trans-
cended as the characters forge bonds that go beyond time and
space.[6] In these terms, Borzage's project is to make the rules of
physical causality irrelevant, a task which is directly related to his
stylistic proclivities with regard to lighting and mise-en-scène.

Belton's analysis makes it easy enough to draw up a list of
thematic oppositions as they appear in *Seventh Heaven*. The list
would be headed by the master opposition physical/spiritual. This
opposition subsumes additional ' philosophical ' categories such as
logical explainability/the unexplainable, externality/internality,
tangibility/intangibility. Under these would go culturally over-
determined oppositions used to signify the others: atheism/religion,
war/peace, sexual independence/sexual union. And then there are
more specific signifiers which may also be culturally overdetermined
but which seem to be more directly activated by the film itself:
ground/sky, low in frame/high in frame, non-home environment/
home environment, and so forth. (Here I only note that the
opposition between materiality and spirituality is one of the central
ideological configurations identified by Marx.[7] Thus *Seventh Heaven*,
with its congruent basic opposition between the ' physical ' and
the ' spiritual ' seems to be not only a model classical film, but
also a model ideological project.)

Once this melodramatic binary structure is outlined, however, it
becomes evident that the narrative movement of *Seventh Heaven*
makes some of the oppositions questionable. They are not question-
able as a result of a wholesale negation of the oppositional struc-
ture, for at its conclusion the film unarguably supports Borzage's
thematic. Also, as I will contend below, this questioning does not
proceed from the kind of semantic fusion which makes up that
traditional critical gold mine known as ambiguity. Rather, it is
based on the film's demonstration that at least one of the terms
in the oppositional structure actually has no ' place ' within that
structure.

The term which *Seventh Heaven* cannot situate is religion, as
signified by its institutional representative. This is a problem
because of the foregrounding of the atheism-religion debate. The
narrative clearly moves to eliminate one of the columns of opposi-
tions whole, that headed by the physical. In that case religion
should be victorious, and in the concluding scene Chico (Charles

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6. One Borzage heroine, Pat Hollman (Margaret Sullavan) in *Three
   Comrades* (1938), actually says to her lover, ' We love each other
   beyond time and space now '.
7. Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *The German Ideology*. In this
   work, of course, the discussion is in the context of a polemic
   against the Young Hegelians, and the attack is on the notion of
   Hegelian consciousness/spirit as an independent entity.

Farrell), former atheist back from the dead, does indeed affirm his faith in the Bon Dieu.

But consider Father Chevillion (Emile Chautard), the character representing the institution of religion. In the course of the film he illustrates many of the virtues resulting from belief in the Bon Dieu, since he performs good works, seemingly provides answers to prayers, and comforts the dying. Yet, in the climactic sequence it is Father Chevillion who confirms the news of Chico's death; he was there and apparently witnessed the event. Diane (Janet Gaynor), who believes in the Bon Dieu and church weddings, finds that her faith in the priest's word leads to a collapse of her faith in the spirituality which the film promotes.

In confirming the laws of physicality (Chico's ' death '), the priest thus produces a separation which should not exist, between religion and the ' spiritual '. The film treats Chico's atheism as a temporary comic aberration, yet concludes with a gap between two terms which, given that tone, should meet finally as signifier and signified: priest and spirituality. In fact, the two terms do meet, but only at the *beginning* of the film, because the priest is such a heavily coded (' iconographic ') figure that he is culturally over-determined. But if that is the case, then part of the operation of this film involves questioning the spiritual aspect of the institution of religion in order to extract it from the institutionalised signifiers of religion. However, for a number of reasons relating to the social formation taken as a whole (which comprehends such determina-tions as Borzage's religious beliefs, industry strictures on critiques of the Church, and so on), it was evidently impossible to do this ' on the surface '. How, then, we must ask, was the operation performed?

V

The priest brings his bad news to Diane precisely when Chico attains his faith, and clearly the priest has missed something crucial. The final shot of the film confirms this. On the right side of the frame in medium long shot Chico and Diane are kneeling in each others' arms. On the left side of the frame stands the priest. In the background is the wall of the attic apartment – the lover's Heaven – with its window opening out on to the Paris skyline. During this shot, a diegetically unmotivated beam of light from the upper left corner of the frame materialises into a strong downward left-right diagonal, blanking out the wall and bathing the couple in a sanctifying light. The window and sky are still visible in the background, but the priest, crowded into the left edge of the frame, is missed by the light and remains in dark silhouette with his back to the audience as the film ends. He remains in the frame, but the heavenly light both excludes him from its glow and cuts him off from the window which has been

somehow missed; relevant yet irrelevant.

Now, a traditional critic would notice this problem, which is fairly obvious. If that critic did not like Borzage, he or she would deal with it as a mistake – a creative confusion. If the critic did like Borzage, he or she would discover some kind of ' fusion ' of the contradictory positions of the priest and call it ambiguity – priest as relevant on one level and irrelevant on another. However, there are of course alternatives to such critical searches for either unity or confusion. For instance, the representation of a physical gap between the priest and the couple at the film's closure raises the possibility that this gap at the intra-frame spatial level is linked to gaps at different levels of the film. This is not quite what a traditional critic of ambiguity would do, for he or she would find the semantic inconsistency valuable in itself, an end point in the analysis. Instead, one might interrogate the signifying chains to find out whether and how this gap is produced by the movement of the film as a whole. One would then look for a signifier or signifiers which fill in (and thereby mark) the gap between religion and ' spirituality ', between the priest and the renewal of Chico.

In fact, that signifier is introduced early in the film when, despite Chico's atheistic arguments, Father Chevillion gives him two religious medallions. This is the second scene in which the priest, who has already brought good tidings to Diane and her sister, appears.[8] Dressed in the traditional garb of the parish priest, Chevillion is from the beginning an overdetermined signifier for religious spirituality as institutionally validated, and none of his actions contradicts this. But in this segment of the film there is a transfer of the spiritual authority which was bestowed on the priest by cultural codes ' before ' the film begins.

Chico has prayed for a streetwashing job and a ' good wife with yellow hair ', receiving neither. He complains by means of inter-titles that the closest he has come to the latter is the lowly Diane – ' a creature like that ' – whose life he has just saved. By melo-code the film makes it clear that Diane is indeed the one sent by the Bon Dieu to Chico. In response to Chico's twin prayers, how-ever, the priest can supply only Chico's streetwasher's appointment and the two religious medals, which are introduced in an inserted close-up that marks them as privileged signifiers.

For the priest, then, the medals defer the fulfilment of Chico's prayer for a good wife, which is to say that they displace Chico's future wife. But the conventional framework of the film ensures

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8. Significantly, when the priest's good tidings are confirmed by the return of rich relatives, the result is the ferociously melo-dramatic beating suffered by Diane at the hands of her sister.

that the audience knows that wife will be Diane. This triggers a double-levelled transformation as the film progresses.

On one level the medals displace Chico's future wife — the answer to his prayers. On another level they also become the place where the power to answer prayers resides. As they progressively demonstrate that power they displace the priest as its locus. For example, they replace the priest in the argument against atheism: as Chico refuses Diane's wish for a church wedding ('I am an atheist — I walk alone', he says), he sits on the medals which comically drive him out of his posture of repose. And when the war breaks out and the couple must marry without the institutional support of church or state, it is the medals which takes the place of those institutions and which the lovers drape around each other's necks to sanctify the union. Most forcefully, during all the years that the two are separated by the war, every day at 11.00 am they gaze at the medals and 'say' to each other the magic litany which violates the physical constraints of space by putting them in telepathic communication: 'Chico — Diane — Heaven.'

In the transfer of the religious medals, then, lies a covert transfer of the signified 'spirituality' away from the overdetermined signifier of the priest. The resulting gap between the institution of the Church and the values promoted by the film is filled in by the medals. Interestingly, this transfer of signification is not 'on the surface' because it is not doubled by intertitles as are most of the other thematic movements (for example, Chico in the climactic scene: 'Diane, those big thoughts I had were the Bon Dieu after all. He is within me — Now that I'm blind I see that'). It is doubled instead by other appearances of the medals when the priest is not present.

Thus the priest is separated from the signification acquired by the two medals. However, spiritual authority is not transferred immediately to another character. Rather, it resides in the medals and therefore it remains external to the characters. The medals can continue to signify 'spirituality' and displace the answer to prayers, while simultaneously indicating that Chico and Diane have not fully internalised the signifieds.

The medals, however, are still religious medals which have their source in the priest, and the displacements involved in this operation are not yet completed. There is another transfer of the medals which leads to another major transformation in signification. This is what will complete the drainage of the signified 'spirituality' from the figure of the priest and institutionalised religion.

As Chico 'dies', he surrenders his medal to Father Chevillion. This action indicates he shares the priest's belief that the moment of his death has arrived. Since for Chico one of the functions of the medal has been to replace Diane, he is returning Diane to herself, giving her up to her own self-sufficiency.

But since the medals no longer guarantee the unity of the lovers,

ture' or 'base' in capitalism. He describes it as the foundation
for the political and legal superstructures which have definite
corresponding forms of social consciousness. But this attribution
did not mark a transhistorical factor; it is only in capitalism that
the economy need be both dominant and determinant. It is deter-
minant in any conceptualisation of the social formation in terms
of a structure with a hierarchy of determinants, in the sense that
the conditions of existence of the dominant relations of production
assign to each of the levels a certain effectivity and mode of inter-
vention in relation to the other levels. If the dominant relations
of production are antagonistic, that is if they take the form of a
social division of labour between a class of labourers and a class
of non-labourers, then the social formaticn contains a State and a
political level as the necessary space of representations of the
antagonistic classes. Such an analysis is far from economistic or
reductionist; necessary to the existence of a particular structure
of economic relations are other levels: the ideological, economic
and usually political. Indeed these other levels are themselves the
dominant level in certain modes of production.

What is meant by the necessary structure of the social forma-
tion is discussed by Hindess and Hirst. They argue for the need to
develop the Marxist concept of the mode of production, if Marxism
is to avoid the idealism which goes with evolutionary accounts of
historical development. They describe the mode of production as
a 'determinate articulated combination of relations and forces of
production', which defines the mode of appropriation of surplus
labour. The notion of surplus has nothing to do with psychological
needs, or 'given' demands. It is only defined in terms of the way
in which the circulation of products is instituted in any society.
Surplus labour exists in any mode of production, given that the
conditions for the reproduction of the labourer are not equivalent
to the conditions for the reproduction of the economy. The pre-
cise form however is a result of a particular mode of appropria-
tion. What is important here is that it is the mode of appropria-
tion of the surplus labour which defines the relations of pro-
duction and which then determines the productive forces. The
structure of the forces of production corresponds to the relations
of production as the indispensable condition of the functioning of
a determinate mechanism of extraction of surplus labour. This
form of correspondence is no more than an effect of the structure
of the mode of appropriation.

Thus the relations of production (under capitalism-commodity
circulation and profit for example) are only understandable in the
context of a structure of economic social relations which includes
as necessary to its existence certain ideological and political con-
ditions. Not only is the economy not assigned a dominant role in
general, but the economic social relations are themselves struc-
tured by the mode of appropriation of surplus labour. This mode

insubstantialities of the film, marking the inadequacies of their material signifiers, holding the place for all the gaps which such material signifiers as the religious medals could not permanently take. Thus, those absences are finally thrown back to the ultimate *deus ex machina*, a *deus* who provides light from outside of the frame, who oversees the fictional world, who dictates the course of events: the film-maker, as God, absorbes the multitude of gaps which the fictional world cannot contain.

VI

The above section of this essay outlines only one operation of displacement of gap or absence. I have argued that the gap between religion and spirituality is ultimately displaced out of the diegesis, an operation completed by the appearance of the shaft of heavenly light in the last shot of the film. I have concentrated on an object of the mise-en-scène in order to illustrate hypotheses about the appearance of difference within mise-en-scène.

However, there are undoubtedly numerous other signifying operations in the film which involve parallel processes. One of the most important examples is in the editing itself. *Seventh 'Heaven* seems well within the classical paradigm, with its systematic use of several common editing devices (eg cutting on movement, the 180-degree rule, inserted close-ups, crosscutting in the climactic sequence etc) which usually work in a manner that does not disrupt, and even seems to reinforce, the coherence and logic of the fictional ' world '. Given the preceding comments on melodrama and Borzage's thematic, the threat posed by cuts may now be described in a more pertinent way: any cut is a potential destroyer of the logic of physical substances. By this I mean a common sense cause-effect logic that operates by spatial and temporal contiguity of substances and on which the mise-en-scène depends in its representation of the coherent physical world within which the fiction occurs.[9]

I have already noted that Borzage's thematic involves precisely a negation of that logic of physical substances. Yet, as an American film-maker of the studio era, he is compelled to construct his fictional world by means of the signifying system of classical cinema. Thus he must challenge the causal effectivity of spatial and temporal contiguity within a system of editing/mise-en-scène interaction which is founded on it.

Borzage meets this challenge by resorting to the most potentially disruptive kind of cutting, crosscutting (alternating syntagm). He begins highlighting the disruption involved by insisting on spiritual

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9. One obvious philosophical connection can be drawn here to Hume. This may be a suggestive comment on the ideological implications of the style of classical cinema.

continuity across physical discontinuity. This occurs during the
film's wartime section when, one day at 11.00 am, Diane in Paris
reacts as a German assaults the shell hole occupied by the wounded
Chico and Rat (George Stone). Diegetically, Diane's reaction is a
consequence of Brissac's presence, and the segment does involve
a crude parallel between the German and Brissac. But the cutting
is from Chico's danger to Diane's reaction, and only then to Brissac
standing next to Diane; therefore, the conventionally implicit causal
sequence does not reinforce the ' logical ' interpretation. .

Thus there is a contradiction between the narrative event (one-
to-one communication) and the conventional ' meaning ' of cross-
cutting (spatial separation, temporal simultaneity). This contra-
diction exposes the crosscutting as such, for the obliteration of the
physically lawful necessity of spatial contiguity (one cannot com-
municate directly with another unless the two are in neighbouring
spaces, eg in the same room) is here made possible by the existence
of shot-to-shot difference, which always has the potential of
obliterating spatial continuity. In this case that potential is
exploited by the narrative line rather than suppressed. (This is
perhaps a common tactic for representing the fantastic in the
classical cinema).

But this disruption is doubled with more force by the highly
significant cut which initiates the climactic alternating syntagm.
There is no preparation in the narrative for Chico's return, and
the first appearance of him back from the dead is not softened
by an explanatory intertitle or even a dissolve. All that heralds his
return is a brutal, flat cut which marks the transformation between
one narrative event (sorrow at Chico's death) and another (Chico's
return), the contradiction between the triumph of the oppositional
column headed by the physical and the triumph of the oppositional
column headed by the spiritual. It was the spatio-temporal absence
between two frames which permitted the disruption of the laws
of space and time within the fictional world. And it is the same
blank spot which at this moment represents the difference between
the ' physical ' and the ' spiritual '. Thus the difference between
frames, which is normally effaced in the classical cinema, here
stands for the difference between the two founding signifieds of
the text.

At this point, then, the very gap which always threatens to
disrupt the coherence of the fictional world is the same one which
divides the columns of oppositions. For this one privileged instant
the difference which a cut marks is blatantly foregrounded as a
signifier. There is a remarkable condensation, as the cut itself
stands for various levels of difference. The film reveals its pro-
cesses and purposes, its complex unity of syntagm and semantics.
At this point the film becomes a subversive threat to the system of
representation of the classical cinema, because its semantics are
such that when they are so directly united with the syntagmatic

system the contradiction with that system becomes evident.

However, the instant of revelation is not sustained and the film turns in a more conventional direction. Following this remarkable cut Borzage falls back on a traditional climactic use of alternating syntagm to place the lovers in the same space. This means that the momentarily apparent gap which exists in the space between any two frames and which was revealed by the opening of the syntagm is reabsorbed by the mise-en-scène. The film ends with an apparently eternal end of crosscutting, the final shot of the attic apartment in which the heavenly beam of light cuts the priest off from the embracing lovers. The film-maker thus seems to achieve the usual goal of narrative resolution and closure.

Yet, if Borzage were to conclude simply by leaving the lovers in the same fictional space, he would not achieve his thematic objectives. He has exploited the mise-en-scène/editing relationship in such a way that one cut highlights a contradiction (among others) between his thematic and the conventions of mise-en-scène. But simply surpassing that contradiction by suppressing editing with mise-en-scène would leave his spiritually liberated characters trapped in their fictional world – which is also a signifying network of physically existent substances. Because Borzage is trying to negate the power of such substances, the resolution ultimately would be false. The narrative movement toward the elimination of ' physicality ' would stand in a new contradiction to the concluding fictional event, and a new gap would open up between the triumph of ' spirituality ' and the final representation of that triumph. The discourse as a whole would be undercut by its last shot and closure would remain unachieved.

Instead of leaving the new contradiction outstanding, Borzage entirely dislocates it to some ' place ' outside the film. The divine directorial beam of light serves to siphon off even more than is at first apparent. It is not only a conventional punctuation mark, the form of which is simply determined by its traditional religious signification. It is also a figure absolutely necessary to Borzage's thematic, a multiply determined figure also imposed on the film by the conflict between the film-maker's objectives and the system of representation supplied by classical cinematic practice.

This can be repeated at a higher level of generality. Borzage's project is to attack a view of causality dependent on temporal and spatial contiguity by means of a system of representation built on the causal effectivity of temporal and spatial contiguity. This produces a difficulty linked to that of showing immateriality with substances. A signifier-signified relationship is usually described as unity, even though the two terms must be somehow different since one is sensible and the other intelligible. But in *Seventh Heaven* the material gap between signifieds and substances of signification becomes so wide as to seem unnatural.

Within the editing/mise-en-scène system of classical cinema,

then, the unity required for signification is shattered due to
Borzage's thematic. So he must move outside of the mimesis he has
produced within the classical system, outside of the diegesis. He
does this by exploding that space and going beyond the fictional
world to the reality of the film-making process itself, by fore-
grounding a gap between shots. He thus begins the destruction of
the environment which was constructed by hiding such gaps.

But Borzage is not radical enough to leave the disruption exposed
in the way a later Hollywood director such as Fuller might.
Classical narrative drives toward resolution of contradictions, and
it forces him to draw the disruption back into the mise-en-scène.
The narrative is not destroyed but continues moving toward the
climactic reunion. So the network of physical substances which
comprises the fictional world again displaces difference.

However, that world itself has been questioned by the very
semantics of the film. Therefore, at the end of the fiction, the
heavenly beam of light is necessary to explain/absorb manifesta-
tions of difference which are still at play. It may well be that all
of the gaps whose places are similarly taken by signifiers are
ultimately displaced to the climax, are marked by that foreign
beam, and are thereby extracted from the classical diegetic space.

If so, then there are rough correspondences between my
description of *Seventh Heaven* and elements of Paul Willemen's
formulation in his reading of Tourneur:

' Of course, by marking the absence with a signifier, the absence
itself necessarily recedes: it is always that which the mark refers ˙
to and is therefore always elsewhere, never there where the mark
is. It is the absence, this founding lack [the space between two
terms of a binary opposition] which generates the metonymic
movement of desire. In terms of the films: it is this lack which sets
and keeps in motion the chain of signifiers constituting the film: a
chain which can be brought to an end only when this absence
is somehow dealt with, either by repression (in which case it is
bound to return as a problem again), death, or the illusory
restoration of plenitude, a solution put forward by religion when
it identifies the unconscious (ie radical heterogeneity) as God '
(art cit, p 22).

VII
These examples of two different levels of signification have been
selected partly to show that *Seventh Heaven* is not at all straight-
forward as ideological practice. Presumably the ' dominant ideo-
logy ' has an investment in the overdetermination of the figure of
the priest. But by the end of the film the priest is inferior to Chico
and Diane in terms of ' spirituality '. At this level one of the
movements of the film is to empty the priest as sign of some of his

culturally overdetermined signification.

Also, as my argument about the editing is designed to show, the classical system of signification encounters difficulties in containing the film's semantic structure. Borzage comes perilously close to ripping open the network of signification within which he works. If one agrees with Althusser that ideology consists in a system of representations, then such ' formalistic ' considerations take on considerable import in the attempt to unpack the ideological practice associated with Hollywood cinema.

The point is not a naive assertion that *Seventh Heaven* is ideologically innocent, but rather an insistence on the multiple determinations readable in it. The condemnation of directors like Minnelli and even Welles and Ophuls because they do not ' escape the ideological determination of the dominant codes ' (Burch and Dana: ' Propositions ', cit, p 47) is thus questionable. When Noël Burch and Jorge Dana take this position they must assume that those codes are automatically efficacious. They must assume that those codes unproblematically – and coherently – enforce regressive objectives unless the film-maker establishes a systematically critical (in all senses of the term) relationship to them within the text. Thus Burch and Dana praise Dreyer for making *Gertrud* a ' critically informative film ', but assign *Citizen Kane* to the coventry of ' transparency ' for establishing a certain ' fixed [!] relationship between signified and signifier ' (art cit, p 57).

What is worrisome is not the attack on an official classic, but the tendency to submit to an opposition – transparent vs self-critical, vs productive, vs opaque, vs self-reflexive, or vs whatever – that is generated by the classical system itself (the ' referentiality ' of a text). Is a text ever transparent? Can one assault ' illusionist space ' without taking into account its necessary inadequacies? Is not such an attack finally grounded on the very mystification it claims to be assaulting, namely the mimetic sufficiency of the editing/mise-en-scène system of classical cinema?

In this context *Seventh Heaven* is exemplary as a film immersed in the classical system of representation and in an essentialist thematic, which still finds itself highlighting the inadequacy (within its own terms) of some of the ' dominant codes '. The point is not an equation of *Seventh Heaven* and *Gertrud*, for the two are clearly different kinds of films. But to construct an analysis of their differentiation by situating oneself either on one side or another of an opposition generated by the system under investigation would seem to be a suspect kind of investigation, polemically convenient though it might be.

*On 25-27 March 1977 SEFT held a weekend school in London
devoted to the study of Hollywood melodrama and its place
within ideology. We print here a report on the school, together
with one of the papers prepared for the weekend and a brief note
on the Freudian concept of 'family romance'.*

Report on the Weekend School

'Female chastity alone, protects social relations from complete
disorder' (E van Hartmann, *The Philosophy of the Unconscious*,
1868).

Hollywood melodrama can be read as an instance of exposed
contradictions within bourgeois ideology. This is the conclusion
reached, for example, at the end of Geoffrey Nowell-Smith's paper*
where he refers to melodrama 'opening up a space that most
Hollywood forms have studiously closed off'.

It is this 'opening' which constitutes the attraction of an justifi-
cation for a theoretical analysis of Hollywood melodrama. But one
cannot ignore the considerable 'pleasure' still generated by view-
ing the movies of Sirk and Minnelli and it is therefore as much a
necessity to locate the current interest in a study of them as to
determine the social, psychical and artistic forces in the production
and consumption of melodramas in America of the fifties. The terms
and approaches used in the weekend school reflected present
cultural and political preoccupations. Thomas Elsaesser's paper,
'Tales of Sound and Fury', reprinted from *Monogram* 4 (1973)
was an early intervention into film history and theory at a time
when the commercial cinema of Hollywood had not yet been
recognised as worthy of serious attention. This initial work has
since been followed up notably with work on Douglas Sirk at
Edinburgh in 1972 (see L Mulvey and J Halliday, eds: *Sirk*, Edin-
burgh Film Festival 1972). Geoffrey Nowell-Smith's paper for the
weekend elaborated Freudian concepts of conversion hysteria with
respect to the films of Vincente Minnelli, continuing work adum-
brated at the Psychoanalysis and Cinema event at the 1976 Edin-
burgh Film Festival. Feminist analysis was brought to bear on
melodrama's concentration on women's sexuality and the family in
Laura Mulvey's paper which discussed the problem of these films'

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* See pp 113-118 below. Page references to the other papers for the
school are to the mimeographed texts circulated by SEFT.

address to a putative/real female audience and the way in which the contradictions for women under patriarchal culture are exposed within them.

Most of these terms of reference were accepted (within the narrow limits of a self-selected audience, of course) but they were used with unwarranted abandon, often rendering banal and innocent concepts and notions that are still highly problematic. For it is precisely the obscured dialectic between class politics and sexual politics, bourgeois ideology and the patriarchal order that is one of the most pressing political issues at the moment. I would also argue that this dialectic significantly determines the process of production and consumption of Hollywood melodrama both as an historical object and as an area of study that continues to be attractive and available to both film buffs and film theorists at the present time. Furthermore, it is that specific nexus of contradictions which renders Hollywood melodrama so fruitful a field for investigation of an intersection of patriarchal and bourgeois ideologies.

The weekend as a whole was good. The school had been well prepared by its organisers who actually circulated the papers beforehand and provided an introductory statement of the main concerns to be addressed at the weekend. In addition to Steve Neale's succinct and interesting outline and Elsaesser's early piece there were papers on each of the directors whose films were screened. The choice of films was apt and closely linked to the papers: Minnelli's *Home from the Hill* and *The Cobweb* and Sirk's *All that Heaven Allows*. The organisation of time between screenings, seminars and plenary sessions produced valuable discussions and allowed detailed study of individual films in the light of the specific points raised by the papers.

Despite the extremely useful and valuable work done at the weekend, there were for me three major areas of dissatisfaction and theoretical concern.

In his introductory paper, Steve Neale quickly dismissed both auteur and generic approaches to Hollywood melodrama and proposed instead a perspective based on current theoretical work on the cinema and ideology. He quoted from Stephen Heath's article ' *Jaws*, Ideology and Film Theory' (*Framework* No 4) which demanded an analysis of cinema not simply as a combination of parts – text, industry and consumption – but rather set within a complex set of relationships which constitute the ' cinematic machine '. The reports from the seminar groups in the final session revealed how many different lines of inquiry had been pursued within each. Analysis of the contradictions and ideological character of the films ranged wide: family relations within class society, the problem of the reception of the movies and the supposed female spectator, the significance of the political and social climate of Eisenhower's post-war America are just a few topics that were mentioned beside substantive discussion of the papers. Such frag-

mentation is, however, in contradiction to the stated intention of
the weekend of articulating relations between these factors within
a notion of the cinematic machine. While it is perhaps inevitable
(and indeed useful as a means of preliminary identification of
relevant issues) that small groups follow up some points in detail
to the exclusion of others, the failure to integrate cannot be
explained merely in organisational terms. The demand for a non-
object centred film theory must be met with a radically new
practice and inscribed into the language of the discussion.

In the second place, all the papers focussed on issues of sexuality
and the family. I quote from Steve Neale's introduction:

' Within this perspective melodrama (and in particular the
Hollywood melodrama of the 1950s) can be seen as the locus of
contradiction and of a potential subversion and disruption of
the dominant ideologies and their operations, most conspicuously
in relation to the family and sexuality. One of the main areas of
narrative action in the melodrama is the family. What is offered
as the basis for plot is a constellation of family relations, with
individual characters marked as sites for the articulation and
interaction of these relations. . . . In either case the set of relations
into which the characters are bound is seen as restrictive, its
pressure potentially, if not actually, destructive. In interpreting this
restrictiveness a psychoanalytical approach may be taken. . . . The
specific correlation of melodrama and the concerns of psycho-
analysis is pinpointed by the fact that Freud's category of " Family
Romance " is in many ways an apt alternative title for melodrama '
(p 2).

While I cannot pretend to comprehend fully what is meant in
Freudian terms by ' Family Romance ' (Familienroman is imprecisely
translated by that term anyway), I am sure this is a misuse in this
context. Freud seems to have coined this phrase to describe specific
childhood fantasies of noble parentage. However there is the
further complication that Heath has used this term to describe a
filmic notion of narrativisation and memory which concerns pro-
cess rather than content or setting (see ' Screen Images, Film
Memory ', Edinburgh '76 Magazine, pp 33-42). It is therefore danger-
ously misleading to use this term in the light of the lack of clear
and agreed definition of its meaning. There is yet another point
to be made about the correlation between psychoanalytic
approaches and melodrama. In the section of his paper entitled
' Where Freud left his Marx in the American Home ' Elsaesser
rightly discussed the explicit imprint of America's adoption of
Freudianism on the character of Hollywood melodrama. This
demands a theoretical refinement and a more double-edged
approach which can take into account both the significance of the
conscious reference to Freudian issues within the film texts and
the quite specific relevance of a psychoanalytic perspective on

precisely these films. This is extremely important for the identification of the particular contradictions exposed within the Hollywood melodrama. In general terms Geoffrey Nowell-Smith may be correct to identify the represented object of bourgeois melodrama as the ' oedipal drama ', but that must be modified by articulating within the significant determinations on the melodrama of the fifties the preoccupation with psychoanalysis both within the text and also in the culture of the audience. The family may well be the locus of socio-sexual initiation and the construction of subjectivity, but one needs to question exactly how a concern with those processes operates within ideology at a certain date, and further, with the necessary reflex, ask therefore what both determines and conditions the use of psychoanalytic approaches to film in the present conjuncture. Furthermore it is necessary to distinguish between the family as a social institution and a place of socialisation which does invite (and indeed generated) psychoanalytic analysis, and the representation of the family in an ideological revision, film. At that remove what does the family signify? Is it to be read as an interrogation of bourgeois family relations or is it a displacement of contradictions in social relations as a whole, or indeed, may it be a condensation of the two?

A film like *Home from the Hill* raises this problem of articulating the relations between the contradictions within the bourgeois family and the contradictions of bourgeois social relations within the social formation. The space of action is not merely the family but rather the small town in which the family of Wade Hunnicutt (Robert Mitchum) is dominant, owning much of the town, its industries and most of the surrounding countryside. While familial issues of paternal authority and the legality and suitability of inheritance do play an obvious and important role, the overall dynamic of the narrative and its placement of positions for the characters is located on an inside/outside opposition in which places – homes for instance – are contrasted with other spaces outside, in the woods and finally and most significantly beyond the frame (both literally and figuratively) of the reference of the film. In this more complex interrelation of spaces and positions the importance of mise-en-scène as opposed to plot or story line becomes crucial. Admittedly most of the papers did discuss mise-en-scène, giving it at times a central place (which I will discuss in a moment). But one final observation needs to be made here in relation to the confusions surrounding the use of psychoanalysis. There seemed to be an excessive emphasis of the literary and dramatic sources of the Hollywood melodrama in the novel, tragedy or theatre. These forms are without doubt important – most particularly the first, since Hollywood melodramas are so often adaptations of novels. But the ignorance of the concurrent development of narrative painting in the nineteenth century, with its particular elaboration of ' mise-en-scène ' in order to spatialise

and render visually legible novelistic forms is a serious and puzzling omission in the study of film.

The notion of mise-en-scène offering an ironic commentary or functioning as a countercurrent leads on to one of the other important issues raised by the weekend which I think needs further work. The eruption of excesses in a film text which cannot be contained and which render any closure forced and expose irreconcilables at the point of the attempted ' happy ending ' can be identified in the contradictions between plot and mise-en-scène. Geoffrey Nowell-Smith suggested an analogy between this process and the mechanisms of conversion hysteria in which ' energy attached to an idea that has been repressed returns converted into a bodily symptom '. At this stage one moves closer to Heath's notion of the cinematic machine by addressing not the components of the film's object but the process, in this case with the notion of the hysterical text in which the repressed returns to the body of the film in its discontinuities, dislocation of placement and confusion of identity. While this is a valuable observation, it still remains to identify the ' repressed ' of which stylistic deformation is but the symptom and to remark, at this stage only in passing, on the classical correlation between hysteria and femininity.

Finally one comes to the issues raised by feminist analyses of Hollywood melodrama. These were specifically explored by Laura Mulvey's paper on Sirkian films in which she emphasised the ways in which films like *All That Heaven Allows* expose the impossibility of female desire under a patriarchal order. Once again there is the problem of definition for it is dangerous if not indeed politically suspect to naturalise by repeated and imprecise usage a term which is still in the process of theoretical elaboration. Laura Mulvey rightly stated the difference between ' the project of giving voice to the problems and frustrations of women from the female point of view and that of examining tensions, where, although women play a central part, their point of view does not dominate ' (' Douglas Sirk and Melodrama ', p 2). For there is a difference, at least theoretically useful, between the lived contradictions and repression of women in a phallocentric order and the appropriation of sexuality in ideological representation.[1]

1. This is of course to some extent an artificial and dangerous separation for, as Heath (' Screen Images ', cit, p 40) clearly states, it is a matter of simultaneity. However, not only are social formations undergoing transformations and changes resulting in different subject positions, but the process of placement and construction of the subject is not a ' once and for all ' affair. The narration of these processes has therefore a historical specificity. In order to approach this in the context of Hollywood melodrama it is necessary to distinguish between femininity as a *position*, woman as a *signifier* in filmic discourse, and women as a *sex* whose position in culture and society is historically one of impotence, silence, negativity and appropriability.

One can read a film like *All That Heaven Allows* in terms of the repression of female desire as Laura Mulvey originally states it. Cary (Jane Wyman), a widowed mother of two college aged children, falls in love with a younger man, Ron (Rock Hudson), but Ron is not only younger than she is, a fact which invites the horrified reactions of her friends and family in the town, but also an outsider and a social inferior, her gardener in fact, who lives outside the town, cultivating trees and living according to the ideals of Thoreau which as Mulvey points out represents a lost American ideal. On the level of narrative Cary's sexual indiscretion in being attracted to a younger man and the difficulties they encounter in the pursuit of the relationship receive an almost excessive prominence; but the spectator is also witness to less explicit conflicts of class and to the opposition between the small-town community and the free self-directing individual at one with nature recuperating and living out the lost ideal. One could accommodate these strands within the framework of overdetermination but one also needs to separate out the various levels of contradiction from the process of condensation and displacement which foregrounds the family and sexuality but leaves traces of further meanings.

There is indeed a grave danger of reifying sexuality outside the social formation. The subjugation of female sexuality to the demands of reproduction is one of the fundamental forms of the oppression of women while at the same time it can be identified as necessary to the existing social order (precisely how and why remains to be precisely elaborated).[2] The contradictions that *All That Heaven Allows* exposes are between social positions and are not simply concerned with irreconcilable desires or the sexuality of women. The closures of these Hollywood melodramas are revealing of this in so far as they end with the relocation of women in their socially determined place as mothers. Fathers may be dismissed in the end, dispatched by each other or by a son as in *Home from*

2. While Marxist-feminists have given much prominence to the attempt to elaborate a theory of reproduction little has been done on the construction of the female subject as reproducer. Freud made some attempts at a theory of femininity without much success. But one should note in passing two points which bear on the following discussion. (1) The oedipal drama for the female subject is not a mere mirror image of the male and it has always been recognised to be considerably more problematic, and potentially so inconclusive as to persist into adult life and to be reactivated by motherhood. (2) The basic Freudian formulation concerns a transference of sexual interest from clitoral/phallic sexuality to a rather more nebulous responsiveness of the vagina, the birth canal itself, despite such physiological evidence as exists which discredits a biological basis for such a distinction. Freud's notion may well merit a further investigation as an almost metaphorical attempt to articulate not what actually happens to women's sexuality but what is necessary in order to forego phallic sexuality so as to function as mother.

the Hill, returned to professional silence as in *The Cobweb* or
reduced to infant dependency as *All That Heaven Allows,* but the
mothers remain in possession of the screen. Hanna (Eleanor Parker)
accepts her maternal role by agreeing to go and live with her
husband's illegitimate son and caring for her own grandson, the
' trouble ' in *The Cobweb* ends with Karen's (Gloria Grahame)
solicitous care of Stevie (John Kerr) and in *All That Heaven Allows*
Cary nurses a supine and childlike Ron.

On the other hand one needs to understand the extraordinary
and disruptive role played by the women's uncontained, withheld
or frustrated sexuality in the dynamic of the narrative which is
often disguised or inverted at the point of its explicit expression.
For instance, it is clear that Hanna in *Home from the Hill* plays
an important role in motivating the action of the plot. The break-
down in the family results from her refusal to sleep with Wade
after her discovery of his premarital transgression, which produces
the impossible positions for her real and his illegitimate son; it is
her narration of these events which precipitates Theron's (George
Hamilton) rift with his father; and she initiates the reconciliation
and in the end puts both sons' names on the tombstone acknow-
ledging a paternity the father did not. But for all this she remains
most shadowy and undeveloped on the level of both characterisa-
tion and identification. On the other hand in *All That Heaven
Allows,* a film that ostensibly places a woman, Cary, prominently
in view, she in fact plays a profoundly passive role and is offered
as the spectacle of the impotent spectator (one is given privileged
access to her look within the text) which is ironically signalised
by the stunned and speechless reflection of her in the TV screen
at the moment of her paralysing realisation of the impossibility of
the choice condoned by her children and the town, whereafter she
develops hysterical symptoms of headaches. In *The Cobweb* two
of the most significant moments of discontinuity and excess erupt
around women. One is the scene on the riverbank with the loss of
clear position as to the identity of the two women Meg and
Karen, finally stated by Meg's ' Who do you think I am? ', and the
other more perplexing is the extraordinary scene between Stuart
(Richard Widmark) and his daughter who thereafter disappears
definitively from the visual field of the film.

These two observations leave two problems, the precise signifi-
cance attached to female sexuality outside familial roles, and the
identification of the positions for the spectator male and female,
both of which I suggest can be illuminated by positing the notion
of the repressed feminine. Such a notion must be grasped in its
two-sidedness, its recto and verso, namely on the one side the
feminine position as a loss for the masculine at the oedipal moment,
and on the other the contradictions between the placement of the
female subject as signifier of non-male in a patriarchal order and
the appropriation of woman, and of the family relations signified

by the mother as crucial terms in bourgeois society. What follows is an attempt to map out some theoretical basis for future work and is, I am fully aware, tentative and perhaps dangerously superficial.

Three points will amplify what I am suggesting.

It is important to restate that, in Freudian terms, the rejection of the feminine position is one of the marks of the oedipal moment through which the masculine emerges in its dominance and privilege while the feminine passes into unspoken negativity (not therefore unknown and unknowable but silenced and repressed). Hence it is possible to identify the return of the repressed manifested in the hysterical text as the return of the repressed and displaced feminine. In using psychoanalytic theory however there are dangers. It is possible to confuse substantive statements made by Freud and other theorists from within 'patriarchal' culture with the more important principles of unconscious processes. The one-sided recognition of a masculine oedipal drama in every film text can serve to restate the status quo and obscure in a merely revisionist manner the more important undertaking, which is to identify from the principles of unconscious processes the points of radical rupture and potential transformation. Furthermore in so far as Freudian theory correctly describes the laws by which we are placed as subjects within a particular social formation, it also posits an inevitable resistance outside clinical or quite specific situations to the very knowledge that psychoanalysis offers. Thus, even within a film theory that uses the concerns of psychoanalysis, these resistances operate to counter the radical possibilities offered by the use of the theory. There is therefore every likelihood that the repression of the feminine is doubly ensured even at the point of potential exposure in theoretical analysis of film.

The second point concerns the position of women in bourgeois society. In early forms of bourgeois society one can identify the particular role allotted to women at the cost of their autonomous sexuality within an opposition inside/outside, private/public, the untroubled home and the world of production and class contradiction. Woman was located in the family home and became the guardian of ' human values ' in a dehumanised world of capitalist social relations and within the bourgeois family itself woman functioned as the keeper of social stratification through elaborate rituals surrounding marriage and Society. The form of the family and its ideological representation have of course undergone considerable transformation in subsequent history; but it is not without significance, I suggest, that in the years after the second world war the dislocation of the economy and attempts to restore peacetime conditions coincided with a major attempt to relocate women in the home and in their familial roles.

From this dynamic of historical process and available modes of representation (which contain quite contradictory impulses) one

comes to the problem of the position offered to the spectator, any consideration of which must take into account both the largely female audience in the fifties and the continuing popularity of Hollywood melodrama in contemporary film culture. The articulation of the positions of the female and male spectator lies at the intersection of patriarchal and bourgeois ideologies seized in their simultaneity and their historical specificity, and in attempting to do this one returns to the nexus of contradictions which the authors of the papers see exposed within the Hollywood melodrama. A variety of these contradictions is indeed revealed but, as Laura Mulvey mentioned in her paper, art forms can function as necessary safety valves within a culture. I wonder whether many of the contradictions whose rehearsal leads to a progressive reading of the Hollywood melodramas of Sirk and Minnelli are really secondary and therefore recuperable by bourgeois culture. That which remains outside both patriarchal and bourgeois orders, and therefore irrecuperable, is the ' feminine ', which includes both the feminine position and the foregone phallic sexuality of women. The repression of this feminine produces the particular uncontained excesses which can only be restored by forced closure, what Sirk aptly and ironically calls the invocation of the *deus ex machina* happy ending. In the films discussed at the weekend this closure provides for the simultaneous repression of the feminine and reconstitutes the family through the acceptance of the only available position for women in both patriarchy and bourgeois society, the mother.

I suggest that it is along these lines that the notion of the cinematic machine can be elaborated in relation to Hollywood melodrama and the fragmentation of the discussion at the weekend overcome so as to identify the precise determinations and the primary contradictions and engage in the most necessary theoretical work at the present time, the dialectic between sex and class.

GRISELDA POLLOCK

Minnelli and Melodrama

What this paper claims is that the genre or form that has come to be known as melodrama arises from the conjunction of a formal history proper (development of tragedy, realism etc), a set of social determinations, which have to do with the rise of the bourgeoisie, and a set of psychic determinations, which take shape around the family. The psychic and social determinations are connected because the family whose conflicts the melodrama enacts is also the bourgeois family, but a complexity is added to the problem by the fact that the melodrama is also a particular form of artistic

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the bourgeois family, but a complexity is added to the problem
by the fact that the melodrama is also a particular form of artistic

representation. As artistic representation it is also (in Marxist terms) ideology and (in Freudian terms) ' secondary revision ', but it cannot be simply reduced to either. As artistic representation it does not ' reflect ' or ' describe ' social and psychic determinations. Rather, it *signifies* them. This act of signifying has two aspects: on the one hand it produces a narrated or represented content, the life of people in society; and on the other hand it narrates and represents to and from a particular standpoint or series of standpoints, ' subject positions '. Now it might be thought that the former aspect, concerning the content, is a question for social (historical-materialist) analysis, and the latter, concerning the form, a matter for psychology or psychoanalysis. What I shall claim is that this is not the case and that the positions of the narrating are also social positions, while what is narrated is also psychical. The ' subject positions ' implied by the melodrama are those of bourgeois art in a bourgeois epoch, while the ' represented object ' is that of the oedipal drama.

MELODRAMA AND TRAGEDY Melodrama originally meant, literally, drama + melos (music) and this eighteenth-century sense survives in the Italian *melodramma* – grand opera. In its early form melodrama was akin to pastoral, and differentiated from tragedy in that the story usually had a happy end. Not much of the original meaning has survived into later – Victorian and modern – usages of the term, but the differentiation from tragedy has become, if anything, more marked. The principal differences are two, both of them the result of developments in art forms generally that began in the eighteenth century and were consolidated later. The first of these concerns modes of address and the second the representation of the hero(ine). At the time it should be noted that in many other respects the melodrama is the inheritor of many tragic concerns, albeit transposed to a new situation.

MELODRAMA AS BOURGEOIS FORM One feature of tragic and epic forms up to (roughly) the eighteenth century is that they characteristically deal with kings and princes, while being written by, and for the most part addressed to, members of a less exalted social stratum. (The authors, even Homer, are broadly speaking ' intellectuals ', while the audience is conceived of, however inaccurately, as ' the people '). With the advent of the novel (cf Scarron's ' Le Roman Bourgeois ') and the ' bourgeois tragedy ' of the eighteenth century, the situation changes. Author, audience and subject matter are put on a place of equality. As Raymond Williams has noted (*Screen* v 18 n 1, Spring 1977), the appeal is directly to ' our equals, your equals '. Mystified though it may be, the address is from one bourgeois to another bourgeois, and the subject matter is the life of the bourgeoisie. This movement of equalisation generally goes under the name of (or is conflated with) realism, but

it also characterises forms which in other respects are not con-
spicuous for their realism, such as the melodrama.

In so far as melodrama, like realism, supposes a world of equals,
a democracy within the bourgeois strata (alias bourgeois demo-
cracy) it also supposes a world without the exercise of social power.
The address is to an audience which does not think of itself as
possessed of power (but neither as radically dispossessed, dis-
inherited, oppressed) and the world of the subject matter is like-
wise one in which only middling power relations are present. The
characters are neither the rulers nor the ruled, but occupy a middle
ground, exercising local power or suffering local powerlessness,
within the family or the small town. The locus of power is the
family and individual private property, the two being connected
through inheritance. In this world of circumscribed horizons (which
corresponds very closely to Marx's definition of ' petty bourgeois
ideology ') patriarchal right is of central importance. The son has
to become like his father in order to take over his property and his
place within the community (or, in variant structures, a woman is
widowed and therefore inherits, but the question posed is which
man she can pass the property onto by remarriage; or, again, the
father is evil and the son must grow up different from him in order
to be able to redistribute the property at the moment of inheritance
etc, etc). Notably, the question of law or legitimacy, so central
to tragedy, is turned inward from ' Has this man a right to rule
(over us)? ' to ' Has this man a right to rule a family (like ours)? '.
This inward-turning motivates a more directly psychological read-
ing of situations, particularly in the Hollywood melodrama of
the 50s.

ACTION AND PASSION   Aristotle defined History as ' what Alcibiades
did and suffered '. Doing and suffering, action and passion, are co-
present in classical tragedy, and indeed in most art forms up to
the romantic period. There is then a split, producing a demarca-
tion of forms between those in which there is an active hero,
inured or immune to suffering, and those in which there is a
hero, or more often a heroine, whose role is to suffer. Broadly
speaking, in the American movie the active hero becomes pro-
tagonist of the Western, the passive or impotent hero or heroine
becomes protagonist of what has come to be known as melodrama.
The contrast active/passive is, inevitably, traversed by another con-
trast, that between masculine and feminine. Essentially the world
of the Western is one of activity/masculinity, in which women
cannot figure except as receptacles (or occasionally as surrogate
males). The melodrama is more complex. It often features women
as protagonists, and where the central figure is a man there is
regularly an impairment of his ' masculinity ' – at least in contrast
to the mythic potency of the hero of the Western. It cannot operate
in the simple terms of a fantasy affirmation of the masculine and

disavowal of the feminine, but the way it recasts the equation to allow more space for its women characters and for the representations of passion undergone throws up problems of its own. In so far as activity remains equated with masculinity and passivity with femininity, the destiny of the characters, whether male or female, is unrealisable; he or she can only live out the impairment (' castration ') imposed by the law. In their struggle for the achievement of social and sexual demands, men may sometimes win through, women never. But this fact about the plot structure is not just an element of realism, it reflects an imbalance already present in the conceptual and symbolic structure. ' Masculinity ', although rarely attainable, is at least known as an ideal. ' Femininity ', within the terms of the argument, is not only unknown but unknowable. Since sexuality and social efficacy are recognisable only in a ' masculine ' form, the contradictions facing the women characters are posed in more acutely problematic form from the outset. For both women and men, however, suffering and impotence, besides being the data of middle-class life, are seen as forms of a failure to be male – a failure from which patriarchy allows no respite.

THE GENERATION GAME   To describe as patriarchy the law which decrees suffering and impairment (if only as motors for dramatic action) and decrees them unequally for men and for women, is also to raise the problem of generations. The castration which is at issue in the melodrama (and according to some writers in all narrative forms) is not an a-historical, a-temporal structure. On the contrary it is permanently renewed within each generation. The perpetuation of symbolic sexual division only takes place in so far as it is the Father who perpetuates it. It is not just the place of the man relative to the woman, but that of the parent (male) relative to the children, which is crucial here. Melodrama enacts, often with uncanny literalness, the ' family romance ' described by Freud – that is to say the imaginary scenario played out by children in relation to their paternity, the asking and answering of the question: whose child am I (or would I like to be)? In addition to the problems of adults, particularly women, in relation to their sexuality, the Hollywood melodrama is also fundamentally concerned with the child's problems of growing into a sexual identity within the family, under the aegis of a symbolic law which the Father incarnates. What is at stake (also for social-ideological reasons) is the survival of the family unit and the possibility for individuals of acquiring an identity which is also a place within the system, a place in which they can both be ' themselves ' and ' at home ', in which they can simultaneously enter, without contradiction, the symbolic order and bourgeois society. It is a condition of the drama that the attainment of such a place is not easy and does not happen without sacrifice, but it is very rare for it to be seen as radically impossible. The problems posed are always

Woman, where Lisa dies after the death of her (fatherless) child,
are all the problems laid out in all their poignancy, and none of
them resolved.

HYSTERIA AND EXCESS   The tendency of melodramas to culminate in
a happy end is not unopposed. The happy end is often impossible,
and, what is more, the audience knows it is impossible. Further-
more a ' happy end ' which takes the form of an acceptance of
castration is achieved only at the cost of repression. The laying out
of the problems ' realistically ' always allows for the generating
of an excess which cannot be accommodated. The more the plots
press towards a resolution the harder it is to accommodate the
excess. What is characteristic of the melodrama, both in its original
sense and in the modern one, is the way the excess is siphoned
off. The undischarged emotion which cannot be accommodated
within the action, subordinated as it is to the demands of family/
lineage/inheritance, is traditionally expressed in the music and,
in the case of film, in certain elements of the mise-en-scène. That
is to say, music and mise-en-scène do not just heighten the
emotionality of an element of the action: to some extent they
substitute for it. The mechanism here is strikingly similar to that
of the psychopathology of hysteria. In hysteria (and specifically
in what Freud has designated as ' conversion hysteria ') the energy
attached to an idea that has been repressed returns converted into
a bodily symptom. The ' return of the repressed ' takes place, not
in conscious discourse, but displaced onto the body of the patient.
In the melodrama, where there is always material which cannot be
expressed in discourse or in the actions of the characters furthering
the designs of the plot, a conversion can take place into the body
of the text. This is particularly the case with Minnelli. It is not just
that the characters are often prone to hysteria, but that the film
itself somatises its own unaccommodated excess, which thus
appears displaced or in the wrong place. This is the case both in
the musicals (*Pirate, Meet Me in St Louis* etc), which tend to be
much more melodramatic than others from the same studio and
where the music and dancing are the principal vehicles for the
siphoning of the excess but where there may still be explosions
of a material that is repressed rather than expressed; and in the
dramas proper, where the extreme situations represented turn up
material which itself cannot be represented within the convention
of the plot and mise-en-scène.

It should be stressed that the basic conventions of the melo-
drama are those of realism: ie what is represented consists of sup-
posedly real events, seen either ' objectively ' or as the summation
of various discrete individual points of view. Often the ' hysterical '
moment of the text can be identified as the point at which the
realist representative convention breaks down. Thus in the scene

118 in *The Cobweb* where the lake is being dragged for Stevie's body there is no certainty either as to what is being represented (is the woman Stuart is talking to Meg or is it Karen?) or as to whose point of view, if anybody's, is being represented. The breakdown of the stable convention of representation allows such questions to be temporarily suspended in favour of what is, at one level, simple narrative confusion, but on another level can be seen as an enactment of a fantasy that involves all the characters whom the plot has drawn together. At the level of this collective fantasy, Stevie is Stuart's and Meg's 'child' and therefore the child Stuart could have had by Meg, did he not already have children by Karen (from whom he is estranged). The possibility of Stevie being dead brings this submerged fantasy to the surface, but not directly into the articulation of the plot. Realist representation cannot accommodate the fantasy, just as bourgeois society cannot accommodate its realisation.

PROVISIONAL CONCLUSION Melodrama can thus be seen as a contradictory nexus, in which certain determinations (social, psychical, artistic) are brought together but in which the problem of the articulation of these determinations is not successfully resolved. The importance of melodrama (at least in the versions of it that are due to Ophuls, Minnelli, Sirk) lies precisely in its ideological failure. Because it cannot accommodate its problems, either in a real present or in an ideal future, but lays them open in their shameless contradictoriness, it opens a space which most Hollywood forms have studiously closed off.

GEOFFREY NOWELL-SMITH

A note on 'Family Romance'
The term 'family romance', whose interpretation is at issue in the foregoing material, was introduced by Freud in his correspondence with Fliess in 1897/98. Its first mentions (*Standard Edition* vol 1, 244, 265) link it specifically to paranoia, but subsequently its application becomes more extended. Commenting on a story by C F Meyer, *Die Richterin*, which he sees as activating a defence against the memory of an incestuous affair, Freud writes: 'The only remarkable thing is that this happens exactly as it does in neurosis. All neurotics create a so-called family romance (which becomes conscious in paranoia); on the one hand it serves the need of self-aggrandisement and on the other as a defence against incest. If your sister is not your mother's child you are relieved of guilt' (*The Origins of Psychoanalysis*, p 256). The major statement of the concept is in the paper ' Der Familienroman der Neurotiker' (1909: translated as ' Family Romances ', *S E* IX, pp 235-41). Here the child's family romance is seen as part of a movement of estrangement from the parents and as having two stages, one (pre-

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estrangement from the parents and as having two stages, one (pre-

pubertal and asexual) in which the existing parents are replaced by superior ones, and a second one (developing from increased sexual knowledge) in which only paternity is challenged and the mother is pictured as engaging in secret infidelities. The motives in this second stage can include sexual curiosity about the mother, a revenge against the parents for punishing sexual naughtiness in childhood and even a revenge against brothers and sisters who are bastardised in the romance while (in a curious variant) the author sees himself/herself as legitimate. Freud notes: '. . . if there are any other particular interests at work they can direct the course to be taken by the family romance; for its many-sidedness and its great range of applicability enable it to meet every sort of requirement' ('Family Romances', S E IX, 240).

Two points may be made here. The first concerns the 'many-sidedness' of this activity of fantasy, the importance of the topic of family relations in the pubertal period and the role of the family romance as an effort to regulate anxieties in the late moments of the working out of the Oedipus complex. Hence in a note added to the 1920 edition of the Three Essays on Sexuality (S E VII, 226n) Freud refers to family romance in connection with pubertal fantasies ' distinguished by their very general occurrence and by being to a great extent independent of individual experience'. Secondly there is in the connection made between family romance and art via ' imaginative activity'. This is evident not only in the treatment of the Meyer story and in the 1909 paper but in ' Creative Writers and Daydreaming' (1908: S E IX, 141-53) where creative writing is seen as a correction of reality, ' reconciling' pleasure and reality principles, allowing ' full play to erotic and ambitious wishes', etc. The connection is present in the term Familienroman itself, variously translatable as ' romance' and as ' novel'.

The relevance of the concept to art, and melodrama in particular, lies not so much in the presumed universality of the family romance (which would still leave each romance the private fantasy property of the romancer) as in the intersection of the one constitutive moment (the fantasy per se) with others in terms of the radical heterogeneity of subject formation. Thus, while the history of the subject described by psychoanalysis is specific, that specificity has to be seen as heterogeneous, inscribed into and inscribing itself on historical, linguistic, social, sexual, etc determinations. It is on such a heterogeneity that institutions like the cinema turn in their ideological functioning, and to understand melodrama in the cinema is necessarily to attempt to focus the investment in a constant repetition of family romance fantasising both in its themes and in its processes of relations and positions of the subject-spectator — which is what is at stake in the various references to family romance in the papers for the melodrama weekend.

S.H./G.N.S.

Politics and Avant-Garde Film in Newcastle

Two consecutive study weekends were held in Newcastle in March which attempted to provide, in John Caughie's phrase, contexts for intervention and mediation in a defined area of current film practice. Some features in the conception and organisation of the weekends served to distinguish them from the SEFT weekend schools about which Caughie was writing (*Screen* v 17 n 2, Summer 1976), and this account is meant to draw attention to these features and to reflect briefly on the usefulness of the weekends.

The purpose of both weekends was to examine the variety of current practices among independent British film-makers, from groups making films as contributions to specific political struggles to film-makers whose main concern is with the limitations of illusionist narrative cinema. The two central and interrelated issues which the weekends were concerned to raise were: firstly, the extent to which films which set out to oppose dominant ideologies at the level of content require also a move away from dominant forms of expression, and, secondly, the extent to which films which involve a move away from dominant forms constitute a political act irrespective of whether they explore directly political content. Although the work of contemporary British film-makers was the subject of the weekends, film by Dziga Vertov, Eisenstein, Brecht/ Dudow and Godard/Gorin were screened in an attempt to provide some historical perspective. Representatives from Cinema Action, Liberation Films, London Women's Film Group and the Berwick Street Collective were invited as well as Peter Wollen, Peter Gidal, Geoffrey Nowell-Smith and Stewart Mackinnon. All the speakers agreed to frame their spoken contributions in the form of a reply to a number of specific and detailed questions extrapolated from the central issues and made available to everyone before the events.

The presentations and discussions of the weekends were recorded and may be published; of immediate relevance to this account is the fact that the context could be provided in Newcastle without being initiated by either the BFI or SEFT. Two determining features account for this most obviously: the existence of the Side Gallery and Cinema which has an explicit commitment to using its small auditorium as a location for the presentation, through screenings

and debate, of current issues in film culture within a discernible
political perspective, and not as simply a place for the screening
of ' great works ' with an approved educational value. (The Side
is not a Regional Film Theatre). The other obvious determinant
is the presence in the region of a number of teachers who recog-
nise that their involvement in politics and film should lead to an
engagement with a constituency which include those not working
in the formal education system. This meant that the conception
of the study weekends could be realised through a group with
access to some of the central theoretical questions, some control
over the means of mediation and some concern to reach those not
primarily concerned with film and film criticism. Concretely, it
meant that, in order to get together the cost of the two week-
ends (£900), substantial grants from the Educational Advisory
Service of the BFI and Sunderland Polytechnic had to be secured,
and the experience of the Side in creating an audience for this
kind of event had to be exploited.

The kind of intervention the weekends turned out to be is,
perhaps, best understood through some reference to the way the
audience reacted to what was offered, since this exposed the
organisational and conceptual confusions which underlay the events.
We were hoping to attract an audience which could be character-
ised as neither ' Screen Education ', that is, professionally involved
in film studies, nor ' Screen ', that is, with an interest in advanced
film theory, and we were hoping to provide a context where pro-
ductions and issues would not be ' consumed ' or vulgarised. More
positively, an audience interested first in politics and only then in
film and prepared to work to provide a base for subsequent political
practice involving film.

In some respects the audience for the four full days did meet
these expectations. Fluctuating around thirty in number, many were
not *familiar* with the issues mentioned above but not so unused
to them as to be unwilling or unable to join the discussions; the
availability of the thirteen questions put to the invited speakers
offered a good starting point from which presentations could
easily move to exchanges and criticisms. Because we had chosen
not to have seminar groups, those who attended every discussion
and screening could be aware of the flow of the argument, and
the exposure of the different film-making practices of the groups
meant that questions and issues could be repeated and refined
until the initial and sometimes abstruse formulations could receive
sharper definition through being set within a range of possible
interpretations.

Within the frame of reference provided by the questions, and
as a result of every speaker's obvious willingness to respond posi-
tively to acute questioning, some of the mediatory objectives of the
weekends were realised: a necessary demystification of the processes
by which films are financed and distributed; an awareness that the

subjects of a film could themselves become involved in the process of production; an understanding that the demand for a certain style of acting in a fiction film could become a challenge to the dominant aesthetic and the institutions legitimatising it, and a conscious realisation of the pervasiveness and effectiveness of narrative illusionist forms. But the final and longest discussion, when all the metropolitan speakers had gone, suggested that the centrality of the issues posited at the outset was only gradually winning assent, and the position of ' structural ' film-makers had received scarcely any serious attention.

This suggests that, although an audience had been found which was neither ' *Screen Education* ' nor ' *Screen* ', the organisation of the weekends had not sufficiently allowed for the lengthy discussion sessions that would be needed for the gradual processes of critic- ism and redefinition to be shaped into more direct formulation of what might be done in future by audience and film-makers. To give a specific example: the discussion of *Whose Choice?* provoked criticism and self-criticism in relation to the bourgeois frame of reference which some felt apparent in the film. By the end of the discussion period this point had been raised, countered, defined more clearly and accepted as an important question by the audience, but at no point did discussion turn to what the film- makers might have done or might be encouraged to do, or how the film might be used politically by those present. Instead, after a brief break, two more films were screened which posed problems about film and politics of a completely different nature.

So, an organisational weakness suggests some conceptual con- fusions: if, for this audience, understanding would take some time and resolution even more, why include in the programme films by Oshima, Vertov, Eisenstein and Brecht in the hope that some clear explanation of their importance for contemporary British practice would be made? The question of what, in the work of Brecht, Eisenstein etc, is relevant now is important enough to merit study, but to add this question to those around which the weekends were explicitly centred and, at the same time, not to be seeking a ' *Screen* ' audience suggests some confusion as to what the weekend could achieve.

The failure to allow adequate time for the discussion of *Room Film 1973* and Peter Gidal's presentation, particularly his answers to the questions about the way his films constitute a political intervention, revealed other ways in which the weekends were not succeeding. More people came to hear Gidal's presentation than to see his films, but the first questions were directed more to the formal qualities and aesthetic determinants of his films than to the problems which the weekends were set up to explore. Gidal had responded to the set questions through a series of prepared statements which he read, and some of these statements were just being opened up — with an openness encouragingly common in all

the discussions – when the session was ended. This might not be just more evidence of unfortunate timing; the swollen audience for this session and the direction of the questions might suggest that, if we had avoided the ' Screen Education ' and ' Screen ' constituency, we had not succeeded in bringing people as much concerned with the politics as with film. (In this context, the title for both weekends, ' Avant-Garde Film ' was not a good one; it was virtually imposed upon the organisers, but attempts were made in all the attendant publicity to emphasise the political, rather than ' film history ' connotations.)

John Caughie suggested that the SEFT weekend schools should be directed to establishing advanced film theory ' in, and as, practice '. In so far as I understand his argument, the project of the Newcastle weekends seems to me to be, in an imperfectly conceptualised way, a similar one, but for us the practice was not to be undertaken in classrooms but in the political work of the intended audience. To a degree the project was realised: some activists who had used films in political situations recognised that other films, or other meanings drawn from the same films, might better have exposed contradictions inherent in specific struggles; some film-makers may have comprehended more fully the possible contexts for the distribution of their films, or the kind of readings that might be made by a non-metropolitan, non-' film culture ' audience, and some teachers may have further the difficult task of rethinking their work in a socialist perspective. Should these things be called ' practice '? If so, together with the mediatory objectives suggested as being realised earlier, we may be permitted to say that the weekends had been a useful intervention, and that work had been done on politics and film in a way which neither compromised the material nor confused the participants. Yet the sense remains with some of the organisers that the predominant process of the study weekends had not been the mediation of theory or the production of knowledge but an act of consumption, and we are not at all clear how this process is to be denied.

PHILIP SIMPSON

Camera Obscura

Late last year appeared the first issue of *Camera Obscura*, produced from Berkeley, California by a collective of four women and describing itself as a journal of feminism and film theory. It is important for several reasons that *Screen* should recognise and welcome it: the first being that the editorial collective declares itself indebted to certain theoretical work being done in this journal – and indeed it is clear that the work *Camera Obscura* is beginning on ' cinematic representation and the signifying function of women within this system ' (p 4) is informed by a number of

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Late last year appeared the first issue of *Camera Obscura*, produced from Berkeley, California by a collective of four women and describing itself as a journal of feminism and film theory. It is important for several reasons that *Screen* should recognise and welcome it: the first being that the editorial collective declares itself indebted to certain theoretical work being done in this journal – and indeed it is clear that the work *Camera Obscura* is beginning on ' cinematic representation and the signifying function of women within this system ' (p 4) is informed by a number of

questions around realism, ideology and the placing of spectator in relation to film system, all of which are and have been central concerns of *Screen*. Having said that however, it has to be admitted that *Screen*'s direct part in constructing a feminist film theory has on the whole been rather a small one (Laura Mulvey's 'Visual pleasure and narrative cinema' (*Screen* v 16 n 3, Autumn 1975) is exceptional in this context), and *Camera Obscura* should go some way toward liquidating this lack: though *Screen* is obviously not thereby relieved of all responsibility.

In its editorial, the *Camera Obscura* collective declares its project to be the constitution of a feminist film theory and practice as a struggle in ideology. A concern with film practice is important, both as struggle *per se* and as conceived to be legitimately informed by a theoretical base. The nature of the theory articulated – the adoption of a psychoanalytically-oriented semiotics – suggests that a feminist cinema which aims to be oppositional would be one that recognises and subverts the constructed nature of film and the ideological implication of its address to the spectator: in this sense, a feminist film practice is seen as exemplary to the degree that it is deconstructive. The films dealt with at length in the journal 'open up a space of contradiction which engages the spectator in the production of meaning; they force the spectator to participate in a dialectical process with the images before her or him' (p 5); and the ways in which this may be realised are considered in the context of a detailed analysis of *Deux Fois,* a film by Jackie Raynal, and an article on and interview with Yvonne Rainer, maker of *Lives of Performers, Film About a Woman Who . . . ,* and *Kristina Talking Pictures*. A translation of Jean-Louis Baudry's article on 'The Apparatus' ('Le Dispositif') raises some of the problems for a feminist analysis in a treatment of the subject in ideology/the spectator-in-the-text. In considering the cinematographic apparatus as working to bring about in the subject a state of artificial regression, the spectator-in-the-text is posed as a pre-oedipal subject, and hence by implication not a sexed subject. If the apparatus does generate a desire to rediscover archaic forms of pleasure, then it constructs as the ideal spectator a kind of infant, a being which lacks language and is therefore socially neither male nor female. If this is the case, then the 'man' which is at the centre of the monocular perspective instantiated by the cinematic apparatus is a human, not simply a male, subject. But it is in fact clear that, throughout its history as representation, cinema has in some ways posed the ideal spectator as male: the pleasurable structures of looking evoked by the cinematic situation are not in themselves sex-specific, but, as Laura Mulvey suggests, the threatening aspects of the look (threatening because 'its point of reference continually returns to the traumatic moment of its birth: the castration complex' (*Screen* v 16 n 3, cit, p 11)) are crystallised in the screen image of woman as the object of the male gaze. It

would clearly be wrong to suggest that woman is therefore *absent*
as spectator-in-the-text; rather perhaps that the operation of the
apparatus in mapping representations of women onto voyeuristic
structures in the same moment implicates those representations
ideologically, interpellates the male in the subject, and decentres
the female in the subject. Attempts like Baudry's to address the
spectator-in-the-text in psychoanalytic terms are crucial for a
feminist film theory precisely because they raise questions which
demand to be answered.

They are important also in that they can provide a base for the
more immediate constitution – through film-making and criticism –
of a·feminist film practice. *Camera Obscura* sees Jackie Raynal's
film *Deux Fois* as working to break with traditional spectator-text
relationships, particularly in the area with which Laura Mulvey is
concerned, that of woman as the object of the look of male spec-
tator (and male protagonist in the film). *Deux Fois* challenges this
voyeurism through a series of transgressions. It is important first
of all that Raynal, marked quite clearly both as maker of the film
(and thus, in charge of it) and as woman, is very much in the film,
indeed in some sense is the subject for the film. The two roles are,
in a very simple way, historically and socially contradictory. As
Camera Obscura points out, the vehicle of the film is primarily
Raynal's body – but unlike the woman as ' star ', she has evidently
determined that this be the case. One of the primary requirements
of voyeurism is that the watcher remain unobserved by the object
of the gaze, and it is no coincidence that a basic rule of the classic
film text is that the camera is never to be looked at; that is, the
spectator is never to be addressed, is never to be the recipient of
the look. Raynal breaks this rule and at the same time, as woman/
director, subverts the conventional filmic inscription of woman as
image by looking directly at, and sometimes addressing the camera/
spectator. At other moments, she sets herself up deliberately as
woman/spectacle: at one point ' the camera begins a movement
often seen in classical film: the camera lingering and moving along
the passive body of the woman offered as spectacle. In the middle
of the shot there is an abrupt cut to the next shot, preventing the
completion of the erotic, possessive gaze of the spectator ' (p 20).
Another shot, in which Raynal, naked except for black tights,
cowering and cringing, invites from the spectator a sadistic response
(the point is sharpened by the presence in shot of a man gazing
at her naked body), a response which is cut off when she looks
straight into camera and urinates. Although there are ways in which
Deux Fois problematises narrativity – in particular by the refusal
of a coherent narrative space (constituted in classical editing by
the ' revelation ' of any off-screen space evoked) – its operation is
analysable in terms largely of its play with and subversion of
voyeuristic structures. *Camera Obscura* claims that the subject is
thus disunified or dissolved: s/he is certainly called upon to be

active in constructing the film.

Yvonne Rainer's films are also seen as an exemplary feminist practice, but for rather different reasons, although they are equally described as deconstructive. It is in some sense their narrative(s) which are the topic of these films. Narrative in *Deux Fois* is implied as narrative space, the space of the profilmic event and off-screen space. For Rainer's films, narrative means address, and their deconstructive character is defined by a refusal to adopt any unitary address to the spectator. All three of her films are ambiguously autobiographical: they narrate through direct address in voice-over or in intertitles, but the source of narration is at once posed as present in the text (mainly by the nature and intimacy of detail) and absent, by the adoption of the third person ' she ' and even more by the occasional delivery of narration by a male voice. Identification with the narrator is made impossible by this splitting and by the avoidance of the discursive ' I '; and identification with characters in the film is inhibited by the distance placed between representation and characterisation: typically, the thoughts and feelings of characters are described in voice-over, and the characters themselves are rigorously non-expressive. Rainer's films can in many respects be described as Brechtian – which is exactly how the *Camera Obscura* collective do describe them in the interview with the film-maker, whose responses are in more senses than one provocative.

The self-reflexivity of all of Rainer's films (and her own formation as choreographer/artist) places them as addressing traditionally avant-garde formal concerns. Indeed her remarks on narrative, which she claims to celebate rather than to subvert (' Where narrative seems to break down in my films is simply where it has been subsumed by other concerns '; ' For me the story is an empty frame on which to hang images and thoughts which need support. I feel no obligation to flesh out this armature with credible details of location and time ' (p 89)) evoke Maya Deren's distinction between horizontal and vertical attack in film: the former being the conventional observation of linear temporality, the latter the examination in depth of a moment, according to Deren the definition of poetry in film (P Adams Sitney, *Film Culture*, p 174). In this sense, Rainer's films are obviously part of an existing tradition. But they depart quite markedly from that tradition in the form of their content, and here perhaps lies their significance for a feminist problematic. *Camera Obscura* maintains that they both articulate crucial features of woman's situation and constitute a questioning of illusionistic film practice around a particular way of representing that situation: ' the complex and ambiguous permutations of male dominance/female submission could not be presented as political, therefore changeable, using the conventional – that is to say, the dominant – modes of representation ' (p 59), dominant modes being heavily implicated in a bourgeois and patriarchal order.

One of the most important, perhaps the most important, theoretical concern of *Camera Obscura* centres on the spectator as spectator-in-the-text: how the cinematic institution creates and places subjects in ideological space. The rhetoric of the film text, which in dominant practice effaces itself within the text and is effaced in the act of reading, creates the spectator. By pointing to the possibility of an authentically feminist film practice which might generate new spectator-text relationships, perhaps by rendering problematic the voyeuristic pleasures of cinema which have historically been embodied in the image of woman (*Deux Fois*), or by posing a threat to the passivity of the onlooker by a text which speaks a woman's life and is constructed in such a way that work has to be done in order to bridge the ellipses and unravel the concentrations of narrative time and space (Yvonne Rainer's films), *Camera Obscura* suggests that it is both possible and essential to provide a theoretical context for this kind of political cinema. However, to place the spectator-in-the-text so firmly at the centre of the project is to run the risk of dismissing the *social* audience. The distinction between the two and the possibility of conflating them are made clear in the Rainer interview when, in answer to a question by the film-maker about the difference between reactions of an audience watching *Lives of Performers* and one watching *The Mother and the Whore*, *Camera Obscura* translates a concern with a possible actual audience into an ideal audience created by classic narrative film. It is clear both at this point and elsewhere that as a film-maker Rainer sees the accessibility of her films (in the two senses of understanding and availability) as an important issue, and to a certain extent, this question gets skated over, perhaps because it is easy to forget that behind the apparatus in action in the cinema lies a whole institutional apparatus.

Accessibility in both senses is built into the cinematic institution, an apparatus for producing material films as well as meaningful films. Films which are ' understandable ' are possible to the extent that their spectators are constituted as receivers of transparent meanings, meanings seen as pre-existent and merely transmitted by the medium; so that the process of meaning-construction is effaced and understanding taken to be unproblematic. It is such films which tend to be made commercially and distributed on a large scale. Film practices which in any way problematise the apparent transparency of meanings are in the present situation necessarily marginal, and so the question about mass acceptability which often underlies the question ' who are these films for? ' is in any case hypothetical, at least in an immediately political sense. Rainer is aware that her films will not command a mass audience: ' The kind of film I make is . . . outside of the distribution system governing narrative films of mass appeal. This may constitute economic autonomy of sorts, but only if you ignore the fact that

ˏ it is made possible largely through the current policies of subsidy by government cultural agencies ' (p 86) – ˎand rejects her own earlier ' idealism ' about the inherent mass appeal of the film medium. *Camera Obscura* mentions the difficulty of seeing *Deux Fois* and the fact that Jackie Raynal cut out the last shot of the film (a ten-minute close-up of a man's face) in what so far seems a vain effort to make it more commercially marketable. In different ways and to different degrees, both instances serve as examples of inaccessibility as unavailability. Apart from the difficulties encountered in getting them made in the first place, the opportunity to see such films is generally quite limited. This argues for an extension of film practice as struggle in ideology to include distribution and concomitantly the building up of audiences through film education and (the province of journals like *Camera Obscura*) through critical and theoretical work.

Camera Obscura endorses a particular kind of film-making as exemplary for feminism: films which have as their central concern a feminist problematic and at the same time offer a challenge to dominant cinematic modes of representation. This is not to suggest any hostility toward what might be called a progressive feminist realism: indeed the usefulness of the documentary mode at least is commented upon. But so are its limitations, in particular the implication of the adoption of illusionist forms (see also *Women and Film* v 2 n 7, Summer 1975, pp 50-59) and the easy recuperability of the positive cultural heroine. This question is of special significance for a feminist politics, for feminism right from its beginning has challenged dominant modes of representation, a challenge which has been allied with awareness of the socially constructed and ideologically implicated nature of meanings, and which when informed by semiotics becomes a powerful critique. It is hardly surprising that in attempting to articulate at once political, theoretical and formal concerns certain films should bear‑ the marks of this challenge. The question is to explore the possibilities not so much of making feminist films but of making films in a feminist way.

ANNETTE KUHN

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